

Examples of Innovations in Traditional Public Schools that are Influenced by Competition from Charter Schools: Charter Schools, Their Impact on Traditional Public Districts and the Role of District Leadership

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education

Professional School Administrators Program

**EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIONS IN TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT
ARE INFLUENCED BY COMPETITION FROM CHARTER SCHOOLS:
CHARTER SCHOOLS, THEIR IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL PUBLIC
DISTRICTS AND THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERSHIP**

Dissertation in Practice

by

PETER STEEDMAN

with Cathy Cummins and Bernadette Ricciardelli

**submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education**

May 2014

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2014

Abstract

Examples of Innovations in Traditional Public Schools that are Influenced by Competition from
Charter Schools:

Charter Schools, Their Impact on Traditional Public Districts and the Role of District Leadership

By Peter Steedman

Dissertation Chairperson: Joseph M. O’Keefe, S.J., Ed.D.

This mixed methods sequential explanatory study applied the economic theory of the educational marketplace to examine district superintendents’ perceptions of charter school competition and its impact on the administrative and instructional innovations launched in their districts. The initial intent of the 1993 legislation on charter schools in the Commonwealth stated specifically that charter schools would serve as an impetus for the development and dissemination of innovation in the districts in which they were allowed to reside. The study examined whether superintendents reported reform activities consistent with the language in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which was intended to spur innovation in charter schools and traditional districts.

This dissertation asked superintendents about administrative and instructional innovations that have taken place as a result of increased competition from the educational marketplace. Though competition from school choice and vocational schools were referenced, the study focused on the impact of charter schools. The findings indicate that the innovations initiated by district superintendents are targeting student populations that are perceived to be most likely to attend local charter schools; namely those students considered by superintendents to be high academic achievers. In response, most superintendents reported innovative marketing strategies rather than programs focused on teaching and learning. Superintendents rarely mentioned programs designed to assist students from low-income families, English language learners, or students with special

needs. Finally, superintendents reported minimal meaningful collaboration between districts and charter schools, except in three isolated and unique circumstances.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the many and varied individuals who participated in my research, who supported me personally and professionally throughout the study, and who guided my thinking and reflection on my scholarly pursuits.

I would like to give a very special thank you to the Sturgis Charter Public School including Executive Director Eric Hieser. He encouraged me to pursue doctoral level study and provided me with support and insight as I wrote my dissertation. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) and its Executive Director, Dr. Thomas Scott, and the individual superintendents who volunteered to participate in the survey and interviews.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my dissertation committee including my dissertation chair, Father Joseph O’Keefe, Ed.D., and dissertation readers, Dr. Erin Nosek, and Dr. Dennis Shirley for their interest in my topic, confidence in my inquiry, and support to the finish line.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, my three children, my parents and my mother-in-law. Their support was immeasurable. I would not have been able to pursue this dream without their continued belief that this endeavor would benefit the entire family.

Executive Summary

This study explored the perceptions of Massachusetts superintendents about the impact of charter school competition on districts, the characteristics that increase or decrease competitive pressure facing districts as a result of competition from charter schools, and the types of actions, initiatives and innovations superintendents report enacting at least in part due to the competition they face from charter schools. We applied the economic theory of marketplace competition as a framework to explore how district superintendents perceive the existence of charter schools by examining their perceptions about whether or not charter schools have been a stimulus to their decision-making about innovation and reform. As its underlying foundation, the study used the driving forces of competition and innovation as expressed in the legislative intent of the 1993 Massachusetts law that established charter schools. Charter schools were initially designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently – by promoting innovation.

Although studies on charter schools are abundant, there is limited literature on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students and parents choosing charter schools and the subsequent impact on how they report competitive pressure. This mixed methods sequential explanatory study, which included survey and semi-structured interview components, has yielded findings about superintendents' perceptions of charter schools within the context of a competitive educational marketplace.

Findings shed light on the direction of public education within the landscape of choice. Not only do superintendents sense urgency to act within a competitive charter school market, but other schooling options for students similarly add pressure to superintendents. Findings also indicate that superintendents perceive that the impact on their district budget is constraining, and that the funding formula does not take into consideration school systems' economies of scale. Most superintendents perceive the choice market as limited or a "quasi-market;" unlike in a pure market-based economy where cost is a driving factor, parents who choose charter schools are not faced with a cost issue. This study found that there is considerable sentiment among superintendents that charter schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles of education. Superintendents perceive that there are two echelons of public schools – public and charter – and that this division further separates society into smaller homogeneous groups thus endangering the growth of a multicultural society. And lastly, all superintendents who were interviewed expressed concern that the driving force of this movement – the charter school legislation - has not been implemented as intended.

This study found that most of the superintendents reported a perception that charter schools "cream-skim" higher achieving students and under-serve or "crop" high needs or more costly students – particularly special education and English language learner students. Additionally, superintendents generally perceive that parents were most likely to choose a charter school because of a perception that it was a more "elite" option and that parents making those choices were more likely to have been engaged in a child's educational life. These perceptions related to reports that charter school competition drained the district of talent and

resources while creating conditions that fostered success in charter schools. Many superintendents reported a strong pressure to find ways to retain high-achieving students while expressing resentment that charter schools under-serve high needs students.

In contrast, superintendents in three small urban districts described three separate charter schools that provided an alternative narrative about the types of students and parents enrolling in these charter schools. Superintendents described that these charter schools enrolled high-needs students proportional to or exceeding the district's student population, filled a gap or met an unmet need, or provided a specialization from which the district could learn. In all three cases, the superintendents reported lessened competitive pressure and increased motivation to collaborate with the charter school. Conclusions point to important equity, inclusion, and policy considerations as well as implications for further study.

We also looked specifically at innovations reported by superintendents that are influenced, at least in part, by the presence of a charter school in the district. This study highlighted a number of administrative and instructional innovations taking place as a result of increased competition from the educational marketplace. Charter schools were but one factor in the rationale for superintendents to select launching a specific innovation. Competition from school choice and vocational schools were referenced. The findings from this dissertation indicate that the innovations initiated by district superintendents are targeting those student populations who are perceived to be most likely to attend the local charter schools; namely those students considered by superintendents to be high academic achievers. Innovative strategies cited by many superintendents focused less on teaching and learning as promoted by the legislation but rather targeted marketing to potential consumers. Innovations that were aimed to support students identified as low-income, English language learners or special education were rarely highlighted by superintendents as a response to the presence of charter schools in their districts. Evidence indicated limited meaningful collaboration was occurring between districts and charter schools except in three isolated and unique circumstances.

Context and Background

The first American charter public school was launched in Minnesota in 1991 as a result of reform efforts to create choice in public education. Charter schools were designed to establish laboratories of innovation and reform that would spur competitive innovation in district schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). Applying market-style notions of consumer choice and competition, charter schools were designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently – by promoting innovative administrative and instructional practices (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Lubienski, 2003; Welch, 2010), by having autonomy that was free from the barriers of some bureaucratic rules and regulations (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; RPP, 2001), and by being accountable to consumers who would be able to choose a school based on results (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie, 1990; Winters, 2012; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). More than twenty years later, research has produced mixed findings about the impact of charter schools on producing substantial and sustainable innovative reforms to the public education system (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Grady, 2012; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012).

Charter school proponents argue that charter schools can produce better and/or more efficient results, test, evaluate and motivate competitive innovation, address equity and access issues for high need student populations, and tend to a variety of reform needs that have been long unaddressed within the public education system which has become overwrought with bureaucratic and institutional barriers to reform (Ellison, 2009; Kolderie, 1994; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Toma & Zimmer, 2012; Winters, 2012). Proponents of charter schools argue that they produce a competitive effect that elevates the performance of traditional public schools (Zimmer, 2009; Carpenter II, 2011; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012) by undermining the otherwise “monopolistic political control of public education” (Lubienski, 2003; p. 396).

Charter school opponents argue that charter schools divert necessary local funds, drain public districts of resources and talents, exacerbate issues of equity and access, do not uniformly produce better results, and distract policy makers and decision makers from addressing true reform efforts (Ellison, 2009; Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Imberman, 2011). Charter school opponents also argue that when charter schools and district schools are forced to compete for the same resources, the presence of charter schools acts as more of a distraction from real school reform by “diverting resources and attention” away from other reform efforts (Merrifield, 2006; p. 18) and negatively impacting the conditions of traditional public districts (Arsen & Ni, 2012) without increasing effectiveness or efficiency (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011) of district schools. Opponents also point to the impact on resources that a charter can have on the local public school, especially in areas that face considerable financial constraints. “As highly motivated and engaged families pull their children from traditional public schools, urban districts have fewer resources – both financial and human – to address their many problems” (Dingerson, Peterson, Miner, & Walters, 2008; p. XII).

In addition, some critics of the marketization of the public education sector argue that market-based theories are not applicable to public education for a variety of reasons. Some critics note that the educational marketplace is more of a “quasi market” due to the disconnect between market choosers (parents) and market payers (tax payers) (Merrifield, 2006; Lubienski, 2003; Bartlett, 1993). Other critics argue that the application of market theory to public education is problematic because of the complexities of the system inherent in the varying social/political contexts resulting from local control (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011), or because marketization of public education changes the purpose of publicly funded education from a “public good” to a “private good” (Lubienski, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

Now that charter schools have been in existence for the more than two decades, a complex question remains: Does competition from charter schools spur innovation in traditional public districts? Our study attempted to answer this question by posing the following three additional questions.

1. How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?
2. What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts?
3. What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?

Our conceptual framework (Figure 1) seeks to explain how superintendent's perceptions of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school impacts the development of innovation in district schools.

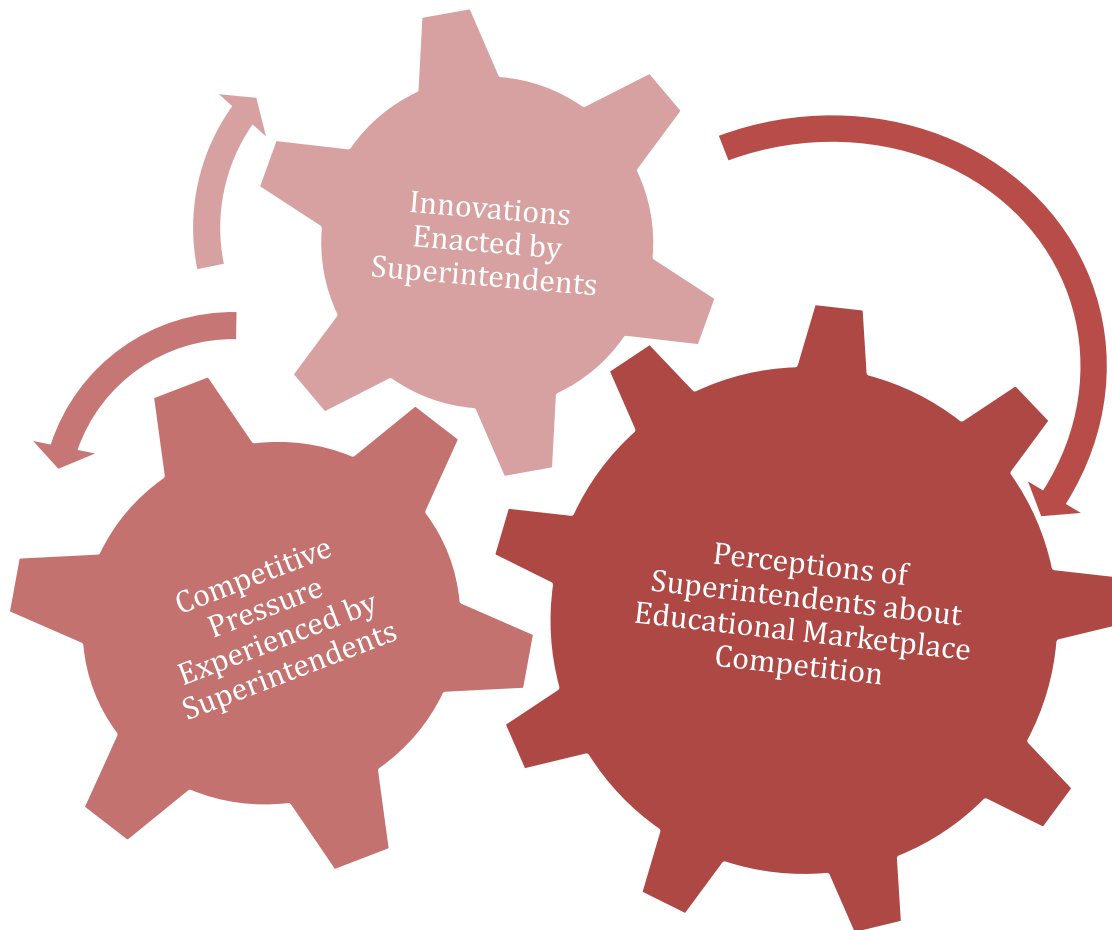


Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

Based on our review of the literature, our research team designed a study that addressed our overarching research question by dividing our study into three primary components, which are tied directly to our three sub-questions.

The first component centered on the perceptions of individual superintendents about charter schools and addressed sub-question 1: *How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?* Perceptions could be based on how the superintendent views the charter school movement as a whole as well as how s/he views the impact of the presence of a charter school option for students from her/his district. Superintendents may view charter schools differently depending upon their own experiences, the opinions of a collective professional group, or the impact charter school funding methodologies have had on their own district resources, etc. (Imberman, 2011; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001).

The second component focused on the nature and degree of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents of district schools and addressed sub-question 2: *What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools' on districts in Massachusetts?* Competitive pressure may vary depending upon context, market share of students enrolling in charter schools, reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools, the types of students exiting the district schools to enroll in a charter schools, and a range of other contextual factors (Linick & Lubienski, 2013; Winters, 2012; RPP, 2001).

The third component sought to identify and explore the types of innovations reported by superintendents as being enacted by district schools in response to charter school competition; this component addressed sub-question 3: *What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?* Actions undertaken may vary from creating district-based choices that mirror or replicate those present in charter schools, allocating resources differently to address particular instructional or curricular approaches, investing time or resources in marketing efforts to promote district options, or joining advocacy or legislative efforts to resist charter school proliferation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Winters, 2012).

We believe that this study provides superintendents in Massachusetts with insights on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts. These will lead to recommendations for districts leaders, policy-makers, and charter school leaders and for future study.

Methods

Our study employed a sequential explanatory mixed design because we sought to draw upon the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2012). We collected quantitative data through the distribution of a state-wide survey of Massachusetts superintendents to identify trends in superintendents' perceptions about the impact of charter school competition on their decisions and actions. We used the survey data to inform the refinement of a semi-structured interview protocol that was used to collect additional qualitative data that deepened our understanding by providing contextual details that support, explain, or diverge from trends that emerged in the quantitative data (Fig. 2).

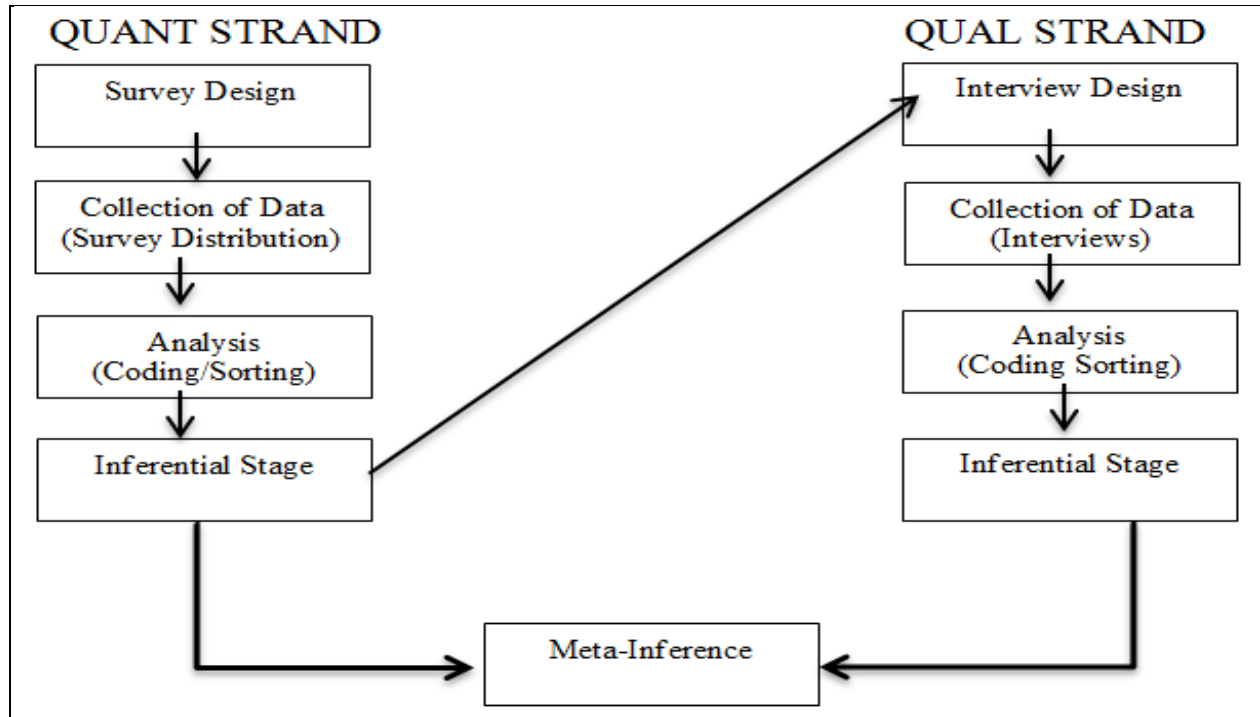


Figure 2. Graphic presentation of sequential mixed design (adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006).

Quantitative Sample (Tables 1 to 3)

- SURVEY: 69 responses – 61 with a charter school option
- Sample size (n) = 61
- 5 out of 51 = Urban (Definition: assigned to Urban Superintendents' Network)

Table 1

| Survey Respondents by Geographic Round Tables (n=61) | | |
|---|----|-----|
| Berkshire County | 2 | 3% |
| Connecticut Valley | 9 | 15% |
| North Shore | 5 | 8% |
| Old Colony | 7 | 12% |
| South Shore | 9 | 15% |
| TriCounty | 8 | 13% |
| Worcester County | 16 | 27% |
| Merrimack Valley | 4 | 7% |

Table 2

| Survey Respondents by Student Enrollment (n=61) | | |
|--|----------|-----|
| Answer | Response | % |
| less than 1,500 students | 8 | 13% |
| 1,500-2,500 students | 15 | 25% |
| 2,501-4,000 students | 22 | 36% |
| 4,001-6,000 students | 12 | 20% |
| 6,001-10,000 students | 3 | 5% |
| More than 10,000 students | 1 | 2% |

Table 3

| Survey Respondents by % of Students from District Enrolled in a Charter School (n=61) | | |
|--|----------|-----|
| Answer | Response | % |
| Less than 1% | 22 | 36% |
| 1% to 2% | 17 | 28% |
| 3% to 4% | 12 | 20% |
| 5% to 6% | 5 | 8% |
| 7% to 8% | 1 | 2% |
| 9% or more | 4 | 7% |

Qualitative Sample (Tables 4 to 6)

- 38 superintendents provided qualitative data
 - 9 superintendents provided both written responses to open-ended sections of survey and also participated in interviews
 - 29 superintendents provided written responses to open-ended sections of the survey (62% of survey respondents)

Table 4

| Interview Participants by Geographic Round Tables (n=9) | |
|---|---|
| Berkshire County | 1 |
| Connecticut Valley | 0 |
| North Shore | 1 |
| Old Colony | 1 |
| South Shore | 1 |
| TriCounty | 2 |
| Worcester County | 2 |
| Merrimack Valley | 1 |

Table 5

| Interview Participants by Student Enrollment (n=9) | | |
|--|----------|-------|
| Answer | Response | Urban |
| less than 1,500 students | 0 | 0 |
| 1,500-2,500 students | 2 | 0 |
| 2,501-4,000 students | 2 | 0 |
| 4,001-6,000 students | 2 | 2 |
| 6,001-10,000 students | 3 | 2 |
| More than 10,000 students | 0 | 0 |

Table 6

| Interview Respondents by % of Students from District Enrolled in a Charter School (n=9) | |
|---|---|
| Less than 1% | 3 |
| 1% to 2% | 2 |
| 3% to 4% | 2 |
| 5% to 6% | 0 |
| 7% to 8% | 1 |
| 9% or more | 1 |

Findings and Discussion

The research team identified themes within individual lines of inquiry that led to overarching findings and conclusions. Table 7 displays the themes and the connections between the lines of inquiry. These themes are explored in greater detail in sections following the table. To ensure the privacy of our participants, pseudonyms were utilized for all superintendents, districts, regions and charter schools.

Table 7

| Themes | Perception of Marketplace | Characteristics of Students/Parents | Example of Innovation |
|--|---|--|---|
| Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts | Charter schools exist in a landscape of other choice | Lack of support for students with disabilities and other high cost students | Revamp/start programs to compete with technical schools; capital and technology improvements; Training for teachers to improve skills targeting specialized populations |
| Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds | Enrollment/Funding implications; difficult decisions about staffing and programming | Types of students and parents leaving (“low cost” “high performing”) increases this pressure; budget cuts cause more to leave; other cuts affect other kinds of students | Pressure to keep certain kinds of students influences district’s innovative priorities |
| Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers | Parents (as consumers) are perceived to be making choices – but because they are not paying for it, it is not a rational market | More engaged parents are making choices; choices perceived to be to support private goals, not community needs | Specific programs targeting marketing, outreach and communications to parent community |
| Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities | Charter Schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles | Underrepresentation of some populations; perceived homogeneity; focus on high performers | New program development seems to cater to high performing students (honors, AP, etc) |
| Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications | Fairness in charter market – funding formula unfair | Lost funding exceeds the expense to educate charter choosers; charters serving high needs students results in less pressure and more collaboration | Advocating and taking active stance in opposing charter schools |
| Limited Realization of Legislative Intent | Implementation not as intended legislatively | Market does not benefit all learners | Funding formula disincentives collaboration and sharing of best practices as intended by legislation |

Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts

While the focus of this study was on the competitive pressure of charter schools on public school districts, data from superintendents indicate that the competitive pressure they are experiencing emanates from a larger landscape of schooling options.

Among the most talked about non-traditional public school public options is the Massachusetts Inter-District School Choice Policy.

Massachusetts legislation provides inter-district school choice as an opportunity for parents to enroll their child into a district that has opted into the program. Some superintendents reported gaining revenue from school choice while others noted significant expenses due to school choice. Superintendents noted competitive pressure from technical, vocational and, in some cases, private schools.

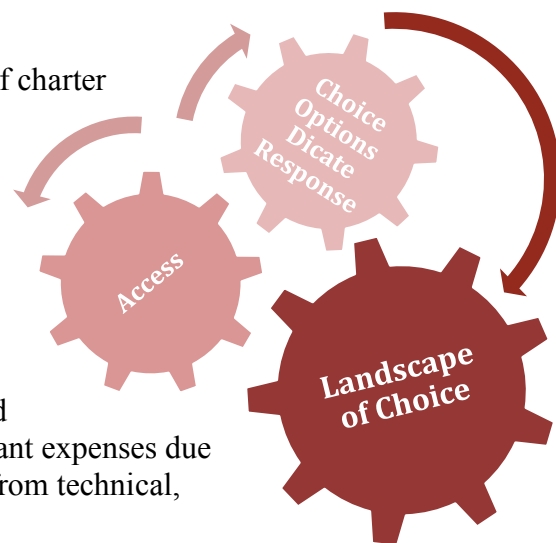
Several superintendents expressed frustration over the ability of non-traditional public

According to the superintendent from Paulberg, the school choice program hurts his district more than charter schools. He commented, "It's probably in the neighborhood of 350 students to 400 students that choice out...it's like 1.5 to 2 million dollars out going annually."

schools to be selective in serving "high cost students."

One superintendent commented that "if a student in a wheelchair wanted to take welding in [the district school]...I have to find a way to let that happen. That could be a \$200,000 expenditure.... but the regional [vocational school] doesn't...because there's a fallback. There's a mandated local education." Many participants stated that charter and vocational schools did not have the same mandates to serve all students, and could therefore promote programs to attract low cost students.

Superintendents report that their response to competition depends on the choices available for their students, but that many of their responses reflect innovations they would have undertaken anyway. Yet, they did report that the competitive landscape did have at least some influence. They have undertaken capital and technological improvements, conducted program and curriculum reviews, and developed training designed to address the reasons they believe parents are making other school choices within their respective communities. Considering the competitive choices in his community, one superintendent reports having built a state of the art performance venue. The superintendent of another district reports that her district conducts rotating self-studies of curriculum and programs, and that they make field visits to other public districts and private schools so that the district can remain competitive with private and vocational/technical high schools. A third district has established a unique language immersion program and a progressive Montessori program to attract the largely middle to upper-middle class population to support district schools over primarily private school options.

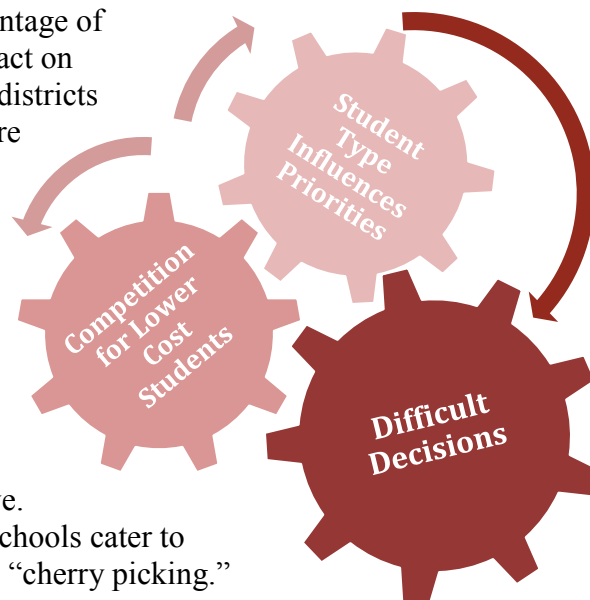


Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds

As one would expect, we found that the higher the percentage of students enrolling in charter schools, the greater the impact on district budget, priorities and decisions. We found that districts that experienced the greatest impact on their budgets were more likely to initiate changes, at least in part, in response to the presence of a charter school. As districts lose funding for students who leave, superintendents are faced with difficult decisions about staffing and programming.

Our findings indicate that the percentage of students leaving a district to enroll in a charter school may have less influence on how the superintendent experiences and reacts to that pressure than the type of students and parents reported to be most likely and least likely to leave.

Several superintendents expressed concern that charter schools cater to low cost, high performing students – one labeling this as “cherry picking.”



*“Charter schools contribute to the underfunding of ‘REAL’ public schools and skim off the more talented students leaving school districts with the more challenging students to educate with less funding.” --
Survey Respondent*

They report that the students leaving cost less to educate than the per-pupil funding they take with them – leading to a disproportionate financial impact. Budget cuts then cause districts to reduce staff or programs, leading more parents to seek choices outside the district.

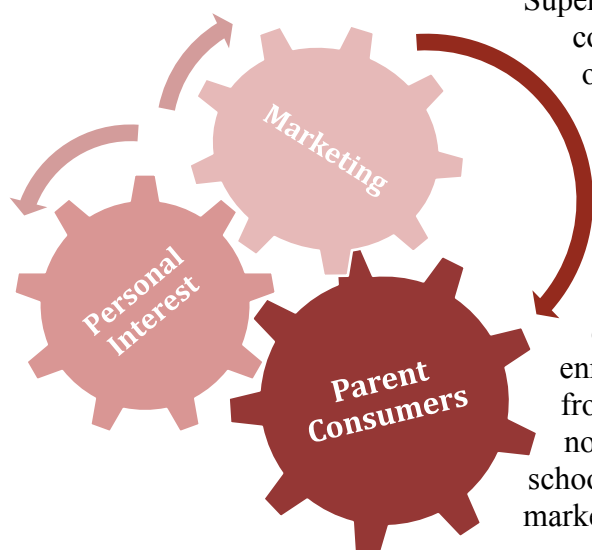
All superintendents who were interviewed expressed the need for them

to positively convey the merits and achievements of district schools to their respective communities in order to attract or retain low cost, high performing students.

Superintendents reported the budgetary necessity to retain these students as an influence on the types of innovations they were compelled to prioritize within the district. Many expressed this as difficult decision-making and not in line with their view of the mission of public education.

*“If I may use a baseball metaphor, Commonwealth Charter Schools start with a 3-0 count for their student achievement goals: they have strong and persistent parental buy-in, and they do not have serious behavior issues, whether related to disabilities or otherwise. The challenge of educating a child with the advantage of engaged parents, no matter how demographically “disadvantaged” the child is, is simply not as great as it is for regular public school.”
–Survey Respondent*

Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers



Superintendents consistently identified the parents as the consumers in the educational marketplace. However, one superintendent argued that parents are not participating in a “rational market” in which price and product influence winners and losers because they are not “footing the bill” and because they are not fully investigating the charter school’s or district’s achievement results. Another superintendent described a mother who reported that despite a “great 9th grade year,” her daughter still enrolled in the charter school in 10th grade when selected from the waiting list. He reported that her choice was not based on a negative experience at the district’s school. Many superintendents argue that it is not a real market since parents go shopping with the district’s funds.

It was reported by more than half of the interviewees and survey respondents that certain kinds of parents were aware of and taking advantage of charter schools, while certain types of parents were left out of the market place. Charter school choosers were described as “highly engaged,” as parents who were likely to have “had their kid on their lap reading a book,” or simply those who were invested in finding options that would best serve their individual child.

Several superintendents described this phenomenon as “getting a private school education with public dollars.”

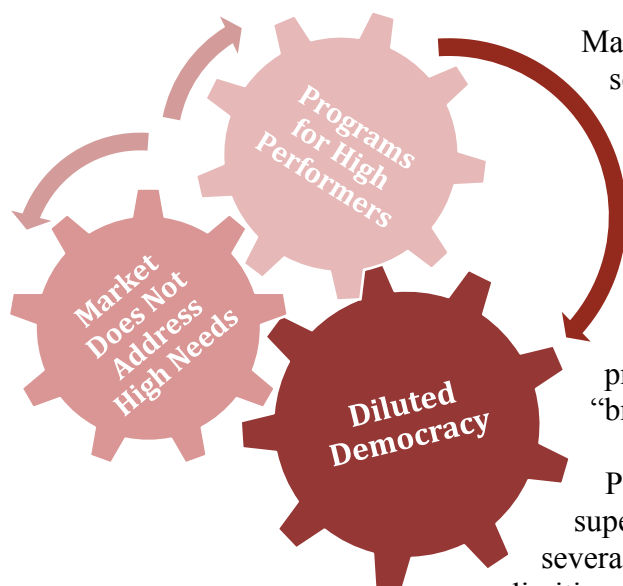
To paraphrase one superintendent, parents are often making a choice seeking the answer to the question, “What can be done for MY child?” while superintendents are required to seek answers to the question, “What should our schools do for our ALL of our communities’ children?”

Superintendents described parents left out of the market place as being unaware, uninformed, or unable to meet the parent requirements. One superintendent reported that charters could require school-day volunteering and attendance at meetings – reducing access to parents who could not afford to take time off from work, or for whom transportation or language was a barrier. Several participants noted that democratic principles of public education were in conflict with market-based programs.

Marketing, advertising and strategic communications were reported to be prevalent responses to charter school competition. Given the perceptions of

superintendents about certain kinds of parents being drawn to charter schools, it is not surprising that superintendents have responded with outreach, public relations, and strategic communication – including advertising. It seems superintendents are responding by making sure that parents are aware of how their own public district may in fact be the best personal choice for a child.

Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities



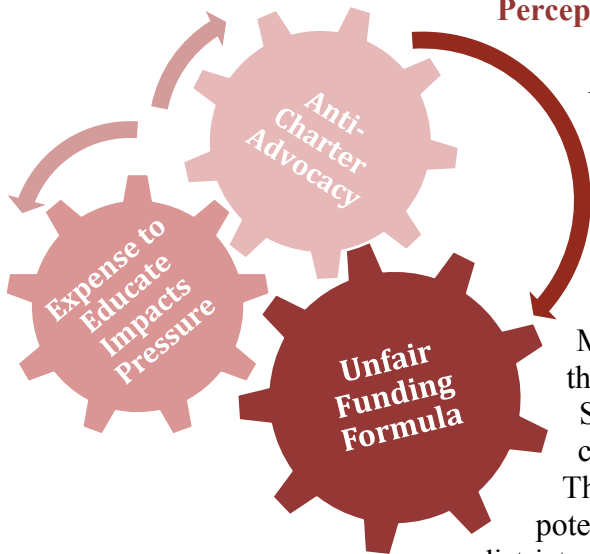
Many superintendents expressed a concern that charter schools (and school choice) presented equity dilemmas – particularly when parents were perceived to be making choices based on desires for homogeneity or being with like students. One superintendent described parent choice behavior as “white flight” and another superintendent described an inability to combat “deep-seeded beliefs” of parents that caused them to prefer sending their child to school with fewer “brown” or “poor” students

Parent choice behavior and reasons were one factor in superintendents’ perceptions of equity threats; however several also referenced the behavior of charter schools as limiting diversity – particularly for high needs or lower performing students. Superintendents reported that students were “returned” to the district when a charter school identified that a child’s needs were too great and that they “didn’t have a program for them.” Other superintendents reported “counseling out” behaviors that included convincing parents that it was in their best interest to voluntarily withdraw from the charter school thus defaulting to the local public option.

Despite this concern about equity and “resegregation of schools” as one superintendent named it, superintendents largely reported new program development aimed to retain high-performing students – namely Advanced Placement, Honors Academies, Gifted & Talented programs, etc. It could be argued that efforts to attract or retain high performing students could be designed to maintain diversity in a student body and to, as one superintendent called it, “retain the brain trust” as high performing students and highly engaged parents clearly have benefits to offer a school community. However, although superintendents consistently reported a concern that charter schools were underserving special education, ELL and in some cases lower income students – there was only one interviewee who indicated collaborating with a local charter school to build their capacity to better serve higher need students.

They say, “Listen... the best thing for you is to go to the public school because if you don’t you are going to be retained,’ or ‘You will have a very difficult time for the rest of this year; why don’t you just get a new life for yourself by going back to the district?’ And back they come. ... So ... they now have filtered their [student body] after they get them using tactics that are very similar to elite private schools.” - William

Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications



A large number of superintendents expressed opposition to the way the charter school law has been implemented in the Commonwealth. In its current iteration, it is perceived by superintendents that the way the funding is formulated is a considerable liability to the district public school. There is a perception that the students who score the highest on MCAS as well as other high achieving pupils are leaving the district schools to enroll in charter schools.

Superintendents believe that this choice by the savvy consumer is having a direct impact on their bottom line. This causes students who cost little, yet who have the potential to boost test scores, to seek alternatives outside the district,

disproportionally leaving behind higher cost, lower performing students.

There are reported instances where charter schools are serving a high-needs population of students who had not been successful within the district public schools. Examples of this can be found in charters that might serve a higher percentage of students on the autism spectrum or schools that serve teen-age parents or students who have been incarcerated. As a result, there is less market pressure felt in the district that send these students to these charter schools with a unique mission and/or approach to learning. In these instances, where the charter serves a particular niche for students whose needs were not being met in the traditional setting, there seems to be greater programmatic collaboration between the charter and the district school.

As these instances of collaboration were not the norm, most superintendents indicated that they were not interested in collaborating with charter schools, as most felt that in terms of academic programming, student support, athletics or the arts, the charters were not providing anything particularly innovative in comparison to what was being offered in the district. This led some superintendents to take on a more active, political role in advocating for a specific policy to be changed.

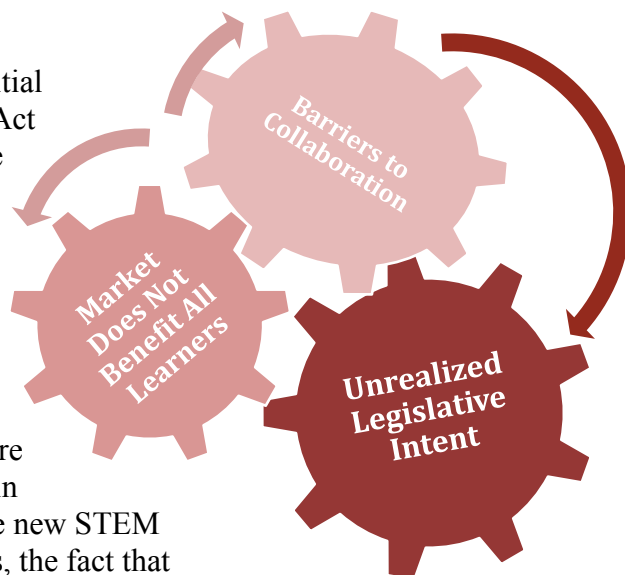
"Compliance is the enemy of innovation.... I think if funding can be addressed then local school districts will not see charters as the enemy and we can start actually saving some money by collaborating and cooperating. Charter schools are the drunken brother-in-law of families in Massachusetts. ...Superintendents want nothing to do with them. They won't collaborate with them. They tolerate them and hope they go away. Local public schools can learn something from them, but that information is stuck in that charter school because nobody's talking to them because ...because they took our money away."

-- Jonathan

Limited Realization of Legislative Intent

The perceptions of superintendents indicate that the initial hopes of the designers of the 1993 Education Reform Act are not being fulfilled. As the data suggest, the debate surrounding the funding formula has inhibited many superintendents and charter school leaders from working together to innovate, experiment and reform.

The competition that is brought forth by the marketplace seems to be having the opposite effect from what the legislators intended. Although there were examples of specific innovations that were developed in response to the presence of a charter in the district, like new STEM initiatives and innovation schools that focus on the arts, the fact that superintendents in our survey listed advanced marketing and targeted communications as the most selected innovation demonstrates one of many perceived unintended consequences of the implementation of the statute.



“Not just due to charter schools, but with overall impact and a declining student population we have closed two schools in eight years. Annually, we are losing over two million dollars to charter schools. The students leaving are typically already proficient and advanced as measured by MCAS. We have had to spend additional money on marketing our district—print ads, radio, etc. to maintain the district's credibility.”—Survey Respondent

Massachusetts charter school legislation (MGL Ch. 79, Section 89, 1993; 2010) was intended to assist struggling schools and to infuse a sense of competition in the educational marketplace. It predicted that the dynamics of competition would reward districts that demonstrate strong student outcomes, while requiring lower performing districts to change or risk losing market share. All boats would rise in this grand experiment.

The evidence suggests, however, that superintendents perceive that consumers view the charter as an elite option thus perpetuating stratification in public schools. The implication of this perception contradicts the intent of the law in that parents, as consumers, seek opportunities at the charter, thus disproportionately leaving behind students who may be more expensive to educate and who may be less likely to be high performers. Actions often were targeted to those students that the superintendent did not wish to lose because of the impact on budgets and test scores.

Our research team heard from superintendents who blame the funding formula for disincentivizing collaboration and the sharing of best practices. There was no evidence that teachers and administrators were attempting to share best practices because the structure, as it stands now, forces both sides to attempt to out-perform the other.

Conclusions

Overall, our study emerged as relevant and timely as demonstrated by the level of interest from our participants. Charter schools are a hotly debated topic in Massachusetts and superintendents who volunteered to participate in our survey and in our interviews expressed great interest in sharing their opinions, experiences, and suggestions related to the topic. We learned that overall, charter schools are certainly impacting traditional public school districts in a variety of ways and that districts are responding in a variety of ways. Most prominent within our study is that superintendents reported feeling a greater amount of competitive pressure when charter schools are perceived to be attracting high performing students from their districts and/or are perceived to be underserving higher needs students. Within this competition for higher achieving students, superintendents reported concerns about equity and diversity but also largely reported responding to this competition with strategic communication, marketing and development of programs that, at least on the surface, appear to be targeting higher achieving students and their parents.

Policy Recommendations

Massachusetts DESE to play a role in bringing district and charter school leaders together.

Our recommendations for district and charter leaders, as well as for public policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, suggest the need to bring both sides together. Although governmental interference may contradict the concept of the free market, there are likely some issues that the DESE could identify where it would be mutually beneficial for charter and district leaders to address together.

The state needs to create policy incentives and remove barriers for district/charter school collaboration. Current policy is perceived by district leaders to have established a “zero-sum game” in which competition is perceived as creating an educational environment of winners and losers. At the base of this perception is the funding formula that is perceived to penalize public school districts by decreasing funding for their district based on charter enrollment. This “winner-loser” mentality is counterproductive to collaboration. Massachusetts should consider enacting initiatives that stimulate collaboration instead of stifling it and thereby creating a “win-win” situation for all students.

The state should commission a study that identifies how the current funding formula affects both public school districts and charter schools. Both the survey and interviews indicate a resounding feeling of animosity toward the funding formula established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Study respondents overwhelmingly expressed concern that competition cannot exist within a context in which the funding is unfairly distributed. This unequal playing field has contributed to a “quasi-market”. Advocacy by district leaders about how the charter funding formula directly and adversely affects their school districts to lawmakers may eventually create a more even playing field for which competition can occur. Given that both districts and charter schools identify the funding formulas as being unfair or disincentivizing the enrollment of high needs students, the state should commission a study to measure the impact of the funding formula on equity in Massachusetts schools. Current policy exacerbates an existing equity problem in Massachusetts’ schools: higher cost students including

special education and English language learners typically cost districts more money to educate – and they are perceived as the students less likely to apply and enroll in charter schools. Massachusetts policy needs to address how to increase the enrollment of these groups in charter schools, and secondly mitigate the effect of the cost differentials among high cost and low cost students.

Recommendations for District Leaders and Charter Leaders

Maintain a balance between competition & collaboration. Given the current policy and funding environment that is perceived to promote competition and inhibit collaboration, it is our recommendation that district leaders make personal efforts to reach out to their local charter school(s) in the spirit of creating the best public educational opportunities for all students. Our research has indicated that, in several communities, healthy competitive and collaborative relationships exist and do benefit students by capitalizing on joint teacher professional development opportunities. Our study however, has revealed that this is not the current norm. District leaders and charter school leaders should consider developing partnerships to address the under-representation of special needs populations including ELL students and students with disabilities. Competition will be most productive if district leaders and charter leaders seek examples of effective charter/district relationships as part of their advocacy.

District leaders must be political players. Public school superintendents would be well served to engage in the political game – both in their local districts and in the statewide political advocacy arena. As the voice of their district, it is important that they engage in consistent dialogue with various constituent groups including students, parents, educators, town/city and state level policy-makers, and the local business community about the merits of the public school system. Education and advocacy beyond the typical communication media are important as the superintendent capitalizes upon his/her “bully-pulpit.” District superintendents should continue to engage in state level policy advocacy with an added emphasis on the equity issues that the current policy fosters. It is important that this advocacy not only occur in the state bureaucratic framework of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, but also perhaps more importantly in the legislative arena with regard to educational and advocacy efforts to state legislators. District leaders are highly respected members of the educational community and policy-makers often seek out their technical expertise regarding educational issues. Superintendents should consider more vociferous advocacy to policy-makers and by making themselves available to them for advice and consultation about the direct effect of state policy on district schools.

District and charter school leaders should have an astute understanding of the funding formula. Given the complexity and nuance of the charter funding formula, it is important for superintendents, business managers, building leaders, charter leaders, and community members to better understand the actual funding impacts in districts on an ongoing basis. This is especially important as district leaders engage in policy-level change in the current funding formula. Our research has suggested that there is a wide range of the level of understanding of the complex formula – and its effects - among district level leaders.

Learn from charters that serve a particular need. A majority of the interviews with

superintendents revealed that they were unaware of the niche or area of specialization of the charter school. Since legislation requires that charter schools identify their mission or area of specialization before getting state approval, each charter school must have a specific identifiable niche or goal. In some cases, the area of specialization can be a supportive outlet to the public school district rather than a competitor. For example, one district superintendent reported that a local charter high school that addresses the needs of teens with one or more children of their own was actually a source of support for the district rather than a source of competition. He reported that he maintains a professional relationship with the leadership of that school and oftentimes refers students to that charter school because of the added support it offers that specific population of students. Awareness of a niche or area of specialization could actually provide a means of support - rather than source of competition – to the public school district.

While there are currently disincentives for districts and charter schools to collaborate and share best practices, district leaders may want to learn from charter schools in other regions who are identified as serving a particular need. Our study has revealed that the most collaborative public school district/charter school relationships exist in areas where the charter school has identified a targeted niche.

District and charter school leaders should identify commonalities. District leaders should consider initiatives or programs that would benefit the district and charter to undertake in common such as sharing teacher professional development opportunities and the sharing of curriculum initiatives.

Promote the notion of “our students.” District leaders should embark on an advocacy campaign throughout the community that the students from that locality are “our students” regardless of where they opt to attend school. This may weaken the “us” versus “them” mentality and encourage a “win-win” educational philosophy among community groups – one that is central to our democratic principles in public education.

Ensure all programs promote equity and access for all learners. District level superintendent and charter school leaders should work to ensure that high quality specialized programs offered in district schools and charters promote equity and access for all learners. The mission and goals of school districts and charter schools must be carried out with fidelity – not simply in a superficial manner to seemingly address a requirement.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored the perceptions of Massachusetts superintendents about the impact of charter school competition on districts, the characteristics that increase or decrease competitive pressure facing districts as a result of competition from charter schools, and the types of actions, initiatives and innovations superintendents report enacting at least in part due to the competition they face from charter schools. The study draws upon the economic theories applied to public education—known as the educational marketplace—as our theoretical framework through which to study the impact of competitive environment on the actions of superintendents in traditional public schools. Our Executive Summary provides an overarching view of our study including our literature review, methods, findings and conclusions.

In Chapter 1 we framed the nature of the problem and explained why we undertook the study of it and framed the research questions. Chapter 2 provides an overarching literature review which provides historical and emerging context for the educational marketplace, including the evolution of competition in other markets and its emerging application to public education, the social-political nature of school choice and its role in the ongoing education reform agenda, research from the field about the competitive effects of charter school competition on districts, research from the field about the responses districts take in reaction to charter school competition, and finally the historical, evolving, and current context for charter schools in Massachusetts. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in our sequential mixed-method study in depth and will also describe our quantitative and qualitative sample.

Because this was a collaborative research study including group research conducted by a research team of three as well as individual studies contributed by individual members of our research team, Chapters 4 (Cummins, 2014; Ricciardelli, 2014; Steedman, 2014) include results

and findings for three separate (yet inter-related) lines of inquiry. In our first Chapter 4 (Ricciardelli, 2014), our research focused on superintendents' perception of the education marketplace, ranging from enrollment trends to funding formulas and national and state policies. In our second Chapter 4 (Cummins, 2014), our research focused on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students most and least likely to enroll (or stay enrolled) in charter schools and the types of parents most likely to seek choice options and how those characteristics influenced the competitive pressure faced by traditional districts. In our third Chapter 4 (Steedman, 2014), our research focused on the ways superintendents reported responding to the competitive pressure from charter schools-noting both innovative and not innovative reactions, and noting patterns in the types of parents/students particular innovations and actions appear to be designed to retain or attract.

Chapter 5 provides the overarching conclusion, bringing together the individual findings within our individual lines of inquiry (Cummins, 2014; Ricciardelli, 2014; Steedman, 2014) to synthesize overarching results, findings and conclusions including implications for policy, district leadership, and future study. In this final chapter we demonstrate various ways in which perceptions of market pressure (Ricciardelli, 2014), nuances to the types of pressure experienced (Cummins, 2014) and actions taken by superintendents (Steedman, 2014) intersect revealing trends and patterns that lead us to overarching conclusions.

Problem Statement

The first American charter public school was launched in Minnesota in 1991 as a result of reform efforts to create choice in public education. Charter schools were designed to establish laboratories of innovation and reform that would spur competitive innovation in district schools (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Bulkley & Wohlstetter (2004), Finnigan, 2007; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). Applying market-style notions of consumer choice and competition, charter schools were designed to provide an alternative to district schools by conducting the business of education differently, by promoting innovative administrative and instructional practices (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Lubienski, 2003b; Welch, 2010), by having autonomy that was free from the barriers of some bureaucratic rules and regulations (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Lubienski, 2003b; Finnigan, 2007; RPP,2001), and by being accountable to consumers who would be able to choose a school based on results (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie, 1990; Winters, 2012; Wohlstetter et al., 1995). More than twenty years later, research has produced mixed findings about the impact of charter schools on producing substantial and sustainable innovative reforms to the public education system (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Grady, 2012).

Charter school proponents argue that charter schools can produce better and/or more efficient results; test, evaluate and motivate competitive innovation; address equity and access issues for high need student populations; and tend to a variety of reform needs that have been long unaddressed within the public education system which has become overwrought with bureaucratic and institutional barriers to reform (Ellison, 2009; Kolderie, 1994; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Toma & Zimmer, 2012; Winters, 2012). Proponents of charter schools argue that they produce a competitive effect that elevates the performance of traditional public schools

(Carpenter II, 2011; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009) by undermining the otherwise “monopolistic political control of public education” (Lubienski, 2003; p. 396).

Charter school opponents argue that charter schools divert necessary local funds, drain public districts of resources and talents, exacerbate issues of equity and access, do not uniformly produce better results, and distract policy makers and decision makers from addressing true reform efforts (Ellison, 2009; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Imberman, 2011). Charter school opponents also argue that when charter schools and district schools are forced to compete for the same resources, the presence of charter schools serves as a distraction from real school reform by “diverting resources and attention” away from other reform efforts (Merrifield, 2006; p. 18) and negatively impacting the conditions of traditional public districts (Arsen & Ni, 2012) without increasing effectiveness or efficiency (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011) of district schools. Opponents also point to the impact on resources that a charter can have on the local public school, especially in areas that face considerable financial constraints. “As highly motivated and engaged families pull their children from traditional public schools, urban districts have fewer resources – both financial and human – to address their many problems” (Dingerson, Peterson, Miner, & Walters, 2008; p. XII).

In addition, some critics of the marketization of the public education sector argue that market-based theories are not applicable to public education for a variety of reasons. Some critics note that the educational marketplace is more of a “quasi market” due to the disconnect between market choosers (parents) and market payers (tax payers) (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006). Other critics argue that the application of market theory to public education is problematic because of the complexities of the system inherent in the varying social/political contexts resulting from local control (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011), or

because marketization of public education changes the purpose of publicly funded education from a “public good” to a “private good” (Lubienski, 2003).

Now that charter schools have been in existence for the more than two decades, a complex question remains: Does competition from charter schools spur innovation in traditional public districts?

Our study applied the economic theory of market place competition as a framework to explore the impact that competition (in the form of charter choice) has had on the decision-making of superintendents in traditional public schools in Massachusetts.

We explored the actions taken by superintendents in response to the competitive effect of charter schools. We focused on how Massachusetts superintendents perceive and react to the existence of charter schools by examining their perceptions about whether or not charter schools have been a stimulus to their decision-making about innovation, reform, or initiatives. Research on the competitive effects of charter schools on traditional public school districts is emerging and still limited (Arsen & Ni, 2011; Carpenter II & Medina, 2011; Maranto, 2006; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). There is little in the literature that explores the impact of charter schools on traditional school district superintendents’ decision-making and actions to promote reform in their districts. Our research is intended to contribute to this literature.

Research Question

How does a superintendent’s perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation?

Sub-Questions

4. How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace? (Ricciardelli, 2014)

5. What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts? (Cummins, 2014)
6. What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that have been influenced by competition from charter schools? (Steedman, 2014)

Audience

The focus audience for this research study is comprised of Massachusetts' superintendents of district schools. We relied on professional connections with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) to assist in gathering data and have disseminated our findings to the leadership of MASS. Our study included an analysis of their collective views. The mission and vision statement of MASS includes as a core value a commitment to "invest in the ongoing learning, support and development of local education leaders" (MASS, 2013). To this end, we believe that this study will provide superintendents in Massachusetts with a wealth of substantive information on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework we devised to frame our study is provided below (*Figure 1-1*). Our conceptual framework seeks to explain how superintendents' perceptions of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school impacts the development of innovation in district schools.

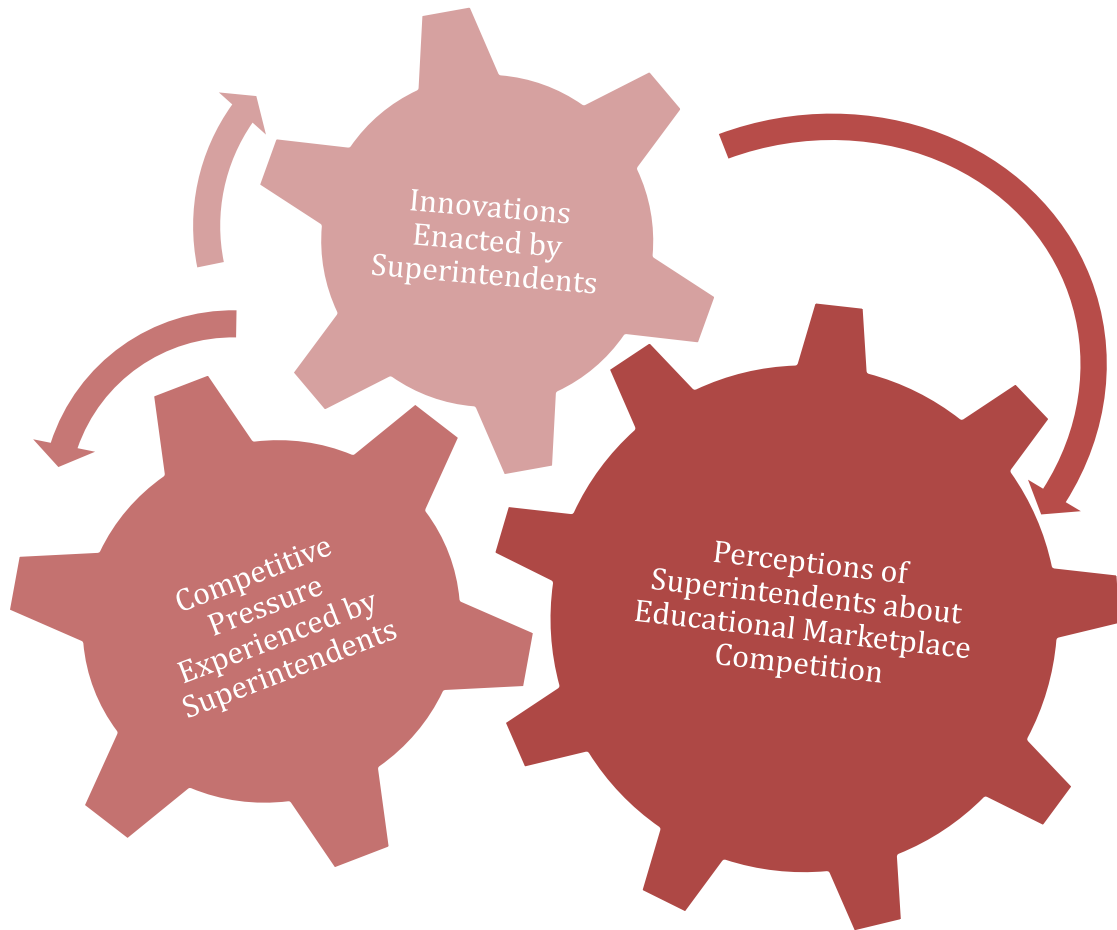


Figure 1-1

Conceptual Framework

Based on our review of the literature, our research team designed a study that addressed our overarching research question by dividing our study into three primary components, which are tied directly to our three sub-questions.

The first component centered on the perceptions of individual superintendents about charter schools and addressed sub-question 1: *How do superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?*

Perceptions could be based on how the superintendent views the charter school movement as a whole as well as how s/he views the impact of the presence of a charter school option for

students from her/his district. Superintendents may view charter schools differently depending upon their own experiences, the opinions of a collective professional group, or the impact charter school funding methodologies on their own district resources (Imberman, 2011; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001).

The second component focused on the nature and degree of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents of district schools and addressed sub-question 2: *What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in Massachusetts?* Competitive pressure may vary depending upon context, market share of students enrolling in charter schools, reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools, the types of students exiting the district schools to enroll in a charter schools, and a range of other contextual factors (Linick & Lubienski, 2013; Winters, 2012; RPP, 2001).

The third component sought to identify and explore the types of innovations reported by superintendents as they were enacted by district schools in response to charter school competition; this component addressed sub-question 3: *What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?* Actions undertaken may vary from creating district-based choices that mirror or replicate those present in charter schools, allocating resources differently to address particular instructional or curricular approaches, investing time or resources in marketing efforts to promote district options, or joining advocacy or legislative efforts to resist charter school proliferation (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Rofes, 1998; Winters, 2012).

Exploring the perceptions of superintendents through surveys (Appendix A) and individual interviews (Appendix B) has supported our effort to learn whether the infusion of educational marketplace competition is perceived by superintendents to have had the impact

intended by Massachusetts' legislators when they enacted the charter school statute in 1993 and when they amended the charter school statute in 2010 (Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89).

Our research team hypothesized that the perceptions of the superintendents impact how they experience the pressure of charter school competition, which then in turn impacts their responses to that pressure. Our conceptual framework (Figure 1-1) is designed to demonstrate that one component can influence the others without requiring a sequential relationship. For example, we predicted that how superintendents have experienced the pressure of charter school competition will also impact how they perceive charter school competition in general and that individual and collective experiences may also impact their decision-making to undertake certain initiatives. We also predicted that initiatives they undertake in districts, whether influenced wholly, in part, or not at all by competition will impact how they experience competition and perceive the marketplace as whole. Our conceptual framework demonstrates our prediction that the educational marketplace is impacting superintendents in ways that cause them to respond or not respond, which in turn impacts their perceptions and future actions. In designing our conceptual framework, our research team relied on the advice of Joseph Maxwell (1998):

Your conceptual framework is a formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying - a tentative theory of what is happening and why...It is a simplification of the world, by a simplification aimed at clarifying and explaining some aspect of how it works. It is not simply a "framework," although it can provide that, but a story about what you think is happening and why (p. 222-3).

Our conceptual framework represents an attempt to tell the story of the impact of charter school competition on superintendents in Massachusetts.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

There has been considerable debate over the impact of charter schools on district schools over the past 30 years. This review of the literature will provide a brief history of the charter school movement, will explore the application of market theory to public education, will discuss the implications of competition as evidenced through political and governmental actions, and will summarize the existing research on the competitive effect and influence of charter schools on innovation. Finally, the literature review will conclude with a review of the history and current status of charter schools in Massachusetts to frame the current context for our study.

History of the Charter School Movement

The genesis of the charter school movement can be traced back to 1974 when Ray Budde, a University of Massachusetts professor, presented *Education by Charter: Key to a New Model of School District* to the General Systems Research Society. His call for individual public school districts to establish “charter schools” within their districts did not gain a lot of traction at the time. It was not until 1988 when Budde’s ideas resurfaced in *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts. Key to Long-Term Continuing Improvement in American Education*, in which he reiterated the need for public schools to offer options in schooling for children. Albert Shanker, American Federation of Teachers President (AFT), publicly expressed support of Budde’s ideas at a speech at the National Press Club, and expanded upon them by proposing that teachers start their own schools (Bulkely & Fisler, 2003; Kolderie 1987; Grady 2012). Ted Kolderie’s 1990 publication, *The States Will Have to Withdraw the Exclusive* fueled the drive to redefine the exclusive role of the traditional public school district in educating our

nation's students. According to Kolderie, "This idea makes it possible to be for public education and for the peoples' power to choose at the same time" (p. 59).

Kolderie was instrumental in helping to write the nation's first charter school legislation in Minnesota in 1991. In 1992 California enacted charter legislation, and six more states followed in 1993. Federal interest in the charter school movement began in 1993 when President Clinton proposed the Public Charter Schools program, and in Congress a bipartisan group of senators and representatives proposed the Public School Redefinition Act; a year later the proposed legislation passed as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). By 2000, 19 states had charter legislation, and in 2014 all but 11 states have laws supporting the creation of charter schools.

Theory of Market Based Competition

In 1955 Milton Friedman put forth an idea that was considered radical at the time: that there should be competition and choice within the field of public education, and that all parents should have access to their child's education funding so that they may choose whatever learning environment is best for their child. Friedman's *Role of Government in Education* unleashed a firestorm of debate over redefining the role of government in education by asserting that it "... serves its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy" (Friedman, 1955; p.14). A year later in 1956, Charles Tiebout, an accomplished economist and geographer, wrote *A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures* in which he touted the virtue of "voting with one's feet" with regard to the public sphere's inability to meet the demands of all citizens (p. 417). The dissatisfaction with a product – in this case the schooling of their children – would cause parents to seek other educational opportunities for their children. According to Tiebout, the status quo may need to be circumvented by a

physical/geographic change in schooling, and by doing so, this option to make a different selection will provide a competitive effect.

Political scientists John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) revived the competition in education conversation in their book, *Politics, Markets, and American Schools*. Applying this theory to the educational system, when funds are provided to families to cover expenses at their choice of a government-approved, privately operated school, the state could generate healthy competition between schools that would increase and improve the schools available to families. Government funding of privately run schools would stimulate a competitive effect among public schools. Privately operated schools “were accountable to the demands of consumers in the educational marketplace, while public schools were entwined in the conflicting interests of constituency groups, politicians, and other democratic forces” (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011). Traditional public school districts are subject to the political interests of labor unions and other well-organized interest groups, and as a result are more responsive to these organized groups rather than to the constituents including citizens, parents, and teachers that they supposed to serve (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Chubb and Moe were in essence writing to support the Tiebout model that advocated choosing an alternative to the provided resource; In other words, if public schools are inadequate, then the way to spur competition would be to establish a means by which the open market can participate in private school education. This argument fueled the charter and voucher program movements.

The rationale for reform in public education has its roots in this belief that competition among schools will cause greater responsiveness to consumers’ interests through a thorough range of options, and an increase in efficiency and efficacy in attaining higher academic achievement (Hoxby, 2003; Lubienski, 2006; Miron & Nelson, 2002).

Today, many educational reformers believe that a market-based competitive environment between schools will spur innovative educational practices in curriculum and pedagogy, thereby increasing the level of student achievement (Lubienski, 2003). The critique of a “one size fits all” bureaucratically administered public education system is rooted in market-theory; it presumes that traditional public schools are insulated from market discipline and are not accountable to their consumers. Exposing schools to the dynamics of the open market where schools are subject to the preferences of consumers will theoretically result in a more rapid rate of curricular and pedagogical innovation (Friedman, 1955; Chubb and Moe, 1990).

Critics of the Market Approach

In England, researchers have observed that a focus on competition has resulted in an education system that shifts the focus from students' needs to student performance, and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school (Bowe et al. 1994). Research in England and Wales suggests that school choice impacts social class by adding to the disadvantage of working class families (Bowe et al., 1994, Grace, 2005). These researchers conclude that the market rewards children for the skill and cultural capital of their parents, which further adds to the social stratification of society. Parents' capacity to engage is heavily influenced by class and race, and thus has implications for schooling equity (Bowe et al., 1994). Parents' involvement in their children's schooling is a social activity, and is a function of their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). This *habitus* – or accumulation of life experiences including familial, economic, political experiences serves as capital. For those with stout *habitus* – have an advantage in the educational choice marketplace.

Critics of marketizing public education also assert that charter schools create an elitist political environment that aims to tip the balance of power in the favor of the privileged class

(Apple, 2001; Harvey, 2005). These opponents of privatization often highlight the failures of marketization of other industries – particularly health care (Gollust, 2006; Kohn, 2005; Rhim, 2007). Many critics claim that market-based competition may dilute democratic values and will undermine public education by diverting resources from the traditional district schools (Maranto, Hess, & Milliman, 2001). Opponents of marketization also question the validity of a market approach to the complex social-political structure of schools, while many others fear it will change the purpose of education from a “public good” aimed at developing an informed and just citizenry to a “private good” based upon economic principles of global competition, choice, efficiency, and local job growth (Cucchiara et al. 2011).

In an editorial demonstrating the dangers of privatizing health care and education, Gollust (2006) notes that marketization is dangerously misapplied to education and health care because the two industries “pose a particular theoretical challenge...because both can be characterized as ‘public goods’ with two essential properties: ‘nondiminshability’ and ‘nonexcludability’ (p. 1734). Both industries provide services that do not diminish when consumers access them and both industries include a mandate to provide service to the public – regardless of a consumer’s ability to pay or perform. Still other scholars note that although market force reforms can inspire some useful strategies or competitive motivation to innovate, if too broadly or expediently applied, they “do not consider the politics of implementation” (Rhim, 2007; p. 264) unique to public education. Rhim argues that market theories are often applied hastily to public education resulting in compromises which can “undermine the potential of the market by increasing bureaucracy” (p. 245) and that are unpredictable given the highly variable contexts (state and local conditions) which are “burdened by institutional and organizational limitations” (Rhim, 2007; p. 264).

According to Scott & DiMartino (2009) prevailing definitions of educational privatization [or marketization] “underemphasize [the] political and social aspects [of public education] and instead focus on the administrative, economic or technical characteristics” (Scott & DiMartino, 2009; p. 433). Scott & DiMartino (2009) argue that privatization is not simply the process of shifting economic control (and revenue) from public to private actors but a more complex set of processes and players; they define privatization as “a range of reforms that redistribute resources *and* control over most aspects of schooling away from traditional public governance structures to a disparate assemblage of parents, teachers, school leaders, community members, private sector actors, and private organizations” (p.433).

The law of supply and demand as it applies to the educational marketplace has its detractors because of the theory’s application limits, primarily because of the absence of price or cost in this specific economic equation. John Merrifield (2006) questions the notion of a competitive market in public education because of the zero price movement inherent in a public system. Because price movement influenced by the activities of consumers is such an integral factor in competitive market dynamics some refer to the educational market-place as a “quasi-market” (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006). The identity of the consumer in K-12 education is the student, and unlike consumers in traditional markets the consumer is not the decision-maker. Rather, the student indirectly affects the decision-maker, who is the parent adding to the argument that charter schools are part of a “quasi-market” (Bartlett, 1993; Lubienski, 2003; Merrifield, 2006).

Competition in Public Education: The Role of Choice

Maranto & Raemdonck (2011) justify the need for marketization in education to combat the Educational Industrial Complex (EIC) – critically referred to as “The Blob” by some

education reformers (Allen, 2009). Key actors in the EIC include teachers unions, education preparation programs within higher education institutions, researchers that influence the fifty state education agencies, accreditation bodies, textbook publishers, major foundations, journalists, and politicians. According to Maranto & Raemdonck, actors in the EIC together advocate that the reforms needed to improve public education include increasing school funding, decreasing class sizes, lengthening the school year, and providing more training for teachers. These same EIC actors, the authors contend, generally oppose reforms that increase transparency, measure academic results, pay teachers based on merit, and offer parental choice – even though “there is a strong empirical case that the latter array of reforms have proven more successful at promoting student achievement than have the former” (Maranto & Raemdonck, 2011; p. 304). The EIC, the authors argue, is fueled by the public: particularly an upper-class elite portion of the public that is willing to acquiesce to the status quo because of its familiarity.

Proponents of marketization of public education support their theories by drawing parallels to successful non-education related marketization including: telecommunications, air travel, postal services, automobile manufacturing, prisons, and health care (Caves, Christiansen, Tretheway, & Windle 1987; Friedman, 1997; Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001). A study assessing the impact of airline deregulation in the mid-1970s found that privatizing the industry resulted in reducing costs by \$4 billion while increasing technical efficiency (Caves et al, 1987).

Milton Friedman (1997), an architect of the school choice movement, summarizes the rationale for applying market principles to public education:

We know from the experience of every other industry how imaginative competitive free enterprise can be, what new products and services can be introduced, how driven it is to satisfy the customers. That is what we need in education. We know how the telephone

industry has been revolutionized by opening it to competition, how fax has begun to undermine the postal monopoly in first-class mail, how UPS, Federal Express and many other private enterprises have transformed package and message delivery and, on the strictly private level, how competition from Japan has transformed the domestic automobile industry” (Friedman, 1997, p. 343).

Initially Friedman’s call for change (1955) centered on the use of vouchers, but within nearly 40 years it opened the door to the charter school initiative. Vouchers are government subsidies that allow parents to apply public funds to a private education. Interestingly, it appears that the notion of paying for private education – including religious schools with vouchers - was seen as radical and a possible threat to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (Saiger, 2013). Perhaps the most important legal development in the choice movement was the decision the Supreme Court rendered in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002). The Court held that vouchers could be used for private, religious based schools. In reality this never really materialized, probably because the charter school alternative gained strength and was more politically and socially palatable to those concerned about the perception of a commingling of religious schools and public funding. The charter school movement was perceived as less threatening to the public/private dichotomy, and therefore was able to gain the support of multiple coalitions including those typically considered liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, etc. (Saiger, 2007). Both charter schools and vouchers are philosophically rooted in neo-liberal ideology that advocates the dynamics of competition as a force that will produce a better product.

The Changing Political Culture: From Progressivism to Neo-liberalism

During much of the twentieth century, progressivism was the dominant educational philosophy, and it was used to make schools more effective instruments of a democratic society. Hallmarks of this approach are the respect for diversity and the assertion that an individual should be recognized for his or her own abilities, interests, ideas, needs, and cultural identity in a collaborative effort to achieve a common good. The term “progressive” arose from a period during the late 1800s – early 1900s when many Americans looked critically at the political and social effects of corporate power and private wealth. With the decline of local community life and growth of big business, John Dewey (1915) observed that citizens were losing valuable opportunities to learn about democratic participation, and he concluded that education would need to make up for this loss. In recent years, neo-liberal approaches have challenged progressivism and its perceived hegemony in the field of public education. With a preference for markets and competitive pressure over bureaucracy and complacency, the neo-liberal approach has gained momentum and has manifested itself in the school choice movement, as seen in the growth of charter schools. In his book, *Brief History of Neo-liberalism*, David Harvey (2005) identifies the essence of the neo-liberal movement: “Neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2).

The market-driven nature of neo-liberalism changes the public education charge from one of popular sovereignty to one of consumer sovereignty (Minow, 2010). In the former, local school boards and citizens serve as a bloc to control schools whereas in the latter, parents exercise the right to shop around for the most appropriate educational product for their children.

In its fundamental form, neo-liberalism and classical economic liberalism that dominated society through the mid-1800s are closely related. Both share the notion that competition drives quality, and ultimately drives out non-contenders from the market. However, there are differences; classical liberalism generally looks at state power as a negative force, whereas neo-liberalism relies on the state as an organizing force that creates an environment more conducive to charter schools through legislation. In classical liberalism the individual is considered to be a rational actor subject to his/her own innate human strengths, weaknesses, and initiative. Neo-liberalism posits that the state must provide the structure and incentives for which individuals can best compete. The role of the “invisible hand” in laissez faire economics is prominent in classical liberalism but is considered to be inadequate in neo-liberal philosophy (Olssen, 1996).

In the current neo-liberal educational environment where the state is requiring more standardization in learning standards, curriculum, and assessment, a classical liberal agenda is simultaneously encouraging choice and competition within the market. The trajectory of American education appears contradictory. Simultaneously, the government is both centralizing and decentralizing the locus of control. The federal government’s allocation of funding through the Race to the Top (RTTT) program provided the financial help needed by states, and therefore served as a catalyst for change. In accepting RTTT funding, states essentially were required to adopt the Common Core, adjust teacher evaluation criteria to include student achievement, and to adopt either the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or Smarter Balanced as a means to uniformly assess progress on the Common Core. These national assessment systems are a manifestation of the interests of neo-conservatives. At the same time RTTT legislation encouraged states to lessen restrictions on school choice options by encouraging states to lift caps on charter schools – thus decentralizing control of schools from

local school districts with the aim of stimulating competition among schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The selection of Arne Duncan as President Obama's choice for Secretary of Education over progressive educator Linda Darling-Hammond made clear that the President intended to advance a neo-liberal policy of free-market school choice. As the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Duncan demonstrated a commitment to working with business partnerships to open new autonomous schools and to shut down underperforming schools (Mora & Christianakis, 2011). While the Common Core State Standards are not administered by the federal government, these common standards were used as a tool by the national government to get state governments to adopt the Common Core into state curriculum frameworks. In Massachusetts, for example, the commonwealth's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted to incorporate the Common Core into its curriculum frameworks for English language arts and mathematics while reserving a 15% discretionary allowance for state options in the Frameworks. At a July 2010 meeting, all board members present voted to accept the Common Core into the Massachusetts Frameworks. In absentia was board member Sandra Stotsky, who has gone on record as a vocal critic of the common standards (MA BESE, 2010). With regard to the creation of national standards, Kristen L. Buras (2008) questions the authority of those who created the Common Core. Ideologically considered neo-conservatives, she questions those who supposedly have the authority to determine what knowledge is of most worth. Buras identifies E.D. Hirsch's landmark book *Cultural Literacy* (1986) and think tanks such as the Fordham Foundation as the driving forces of the neo-conservative standards-based movement. The evolution of the debate over the past fifty-nine years of the role of marketplace competition in public education can be defined in terms of John Kingdon's multiple stream framework (1995).

Kingdon's *problem definition* in the case of charter schools is politically dichotomous: on the political right the problem has been defined as one of inefficiency and as a result, schools need to be run like a business and subject to intense competition. On the political left, the problem has been defined as one of social injustice and segregation in education. Initially embraced by market-oriented political conservatives, the charter school movement now encompasses a more diverse political coalition. Some typically considered liberal or "left-leaning" now view the charter school movement as a form of redistributive social justice. The establishment of charter schools makes it possible for students who do not have the wherewithal to live in a good school district or to pay for a private school, to have a choice of option for their education (Vitteriti, 2010). The *policy response* has been the incremental state approval of charter legislation, which, comparatively speaking, is remarkably similar across the states in legislative intent and language. The *political process* has been surprisingly smooth with the exception of the limited discord among teachers' unions (McGuinn, 2012). Charter advocates form an odd coalition comprised of conservative small government advocates and liberal civil rights leaders – both seeking to increase parental choice in education.

Government Action

The rationale for the establishment of charters schools in Massachusetts is defined in the General laws, Chapter 71, Section 89 (1993) "The purposes of establishing charter schools are: (i) to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education." These innovations were described as needing to have an impact on the district schools in which they were situated. This language is consistent with the charter school and school choice authorizing statutes across the United States.

A number of district schools have responded to the presence of charter schools in a myriad of ways. Some have, indeed, developed programs that would be considered innovative (Ellison, 2009), altering either the programmatic offerings to students, altering the systems within the school or allocating resources to promote the achievements of the district school (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Hoxby, Murarka, & Kang, 2009; Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998).

Choice policy varies considerably from state to state. Approximately 5% of all public schools in the nation are public charter schools. Arizona, California, Florida, Ohio, and Texas have the most charter schools. Twenty-one of the forty-two states that have approved charter legislation have done so with caps; some limit the number of schools allowed and others limit the number of students per school. In schools with high demand, the selections are usually made through a random lottery process. In Hawaii the total number of charter schools allowed is 48; in New Mexico no more than 15 charter schools can be approved per year; and in Illinois charter schools are limited to 120 with 75 of those schools designated for the city of Chicago. The federal government has tried to stimulate parental choice by offering incentives to states to increase the supply of charter schools. In November 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that in order for states to compete for \$4.35 billion in “Race to the Top” funds, restrictions on the growth of charter schools, including caps on the number of charter schools or the number of students who can enroll in charter schools, would need to be curtailed (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Policy changes are also emanating from state level legislation. Michigan state senator Buzz Thomas has proposed a “smart cap” approach in which schools with a demonstrated record of performance would be exempt from limitations to expand (Dillon, 2010).

The federal government has added incentives for states to move in this direction. The 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) funding application applied pressure to states to create legislation supportive of charter school growth. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, is quoted as saying, “States that do not have public charter laws or put artificial caps on the growth of charter schools will jeopardize their application under the Race to the Top Fund” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Central to state legislation across the country is the acknowledgement that supply and demand forces in a competitive market are at the core of the educational reform movement.

Model legislative language promoted by the Center for Educational Reform includes suggestions that legislation include intent language that supports parents’ flexibility to choose among diverse educational opportunities and that the demand for quality public school choices in states surpasses the available supply. Several states, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wyoming include specific language around “providing parents and pupils with expanded choice in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system” in their charter school legislative intent. In Massachusetts, charter schools were established to “stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education” and to provide “models for replication in other public schools” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 1993).

Charter schools in the Commonwealth have followed a national trend of increasing popularity of this alternative over the past five years, which has led some scholars to explore the reasons for the long waitlists. Have charters become, as initially intended by the legislation, laboratories of innovation that specifically target teaching and learning? In Minnesota the purpose of charter schools includes the ability to “encourage the use of different and innovative

teaching methods; and to create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes” (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) addressed this in looking at how charters could be seen as a laboratory as a result of competition. “This perspective posits that charter schools, when liberated from governmental regulations, will experiment with new educational practices. Should these new practices prove useful or innovative, they can then be adopted by regular public schools” (p. 42). Under New York State law, charter schools are expected to encourage the use of different and innovative techniques. Lubienski (2003) states, “choice, competition, and innovation are cast as the necessary vehicles for advancing academic outcomes” (p. 397). Market driven reform, however, was not only trumpeted at the state level. Some at the federal level see the opportunity to launch innovations as a response to the market as the most appealing features of the charter school movement.

The Competitive Effect of Charter Schools

Charter schools represent one form of marketization of the public education sector and were predicted by theorists to create competitive pressure on the public education system that would inevitably lead to improvements and efficiencies. Now that charter schools have been in the educational marketplace for more than two decades, research is beginning to uncover patterns and themes about the competitive effect, responses to competition, and impact on the decision-making activities of traditional public schools. Competitive effects vary depending upon complex state, local and district characteristics as well as the nature of the competition.

Influences on the competitive effect include the volume of students leaving public districts for charters, the conditions in the traditional public district, the culture of the traditional district, the reasons parents choose to enroll their students in charter schools, and the achievement results at both charter schools and traditional public schools.

Research on competitive effects and districts' response to competitive effects has had mixed conclusions. Zimmer & Buddin (2009) explain that the "inconsistency of these results may stem from researchers using inconsistent measures of competition, or it could stem from examining the competitive effects in different states and districts with different competitive environments" (p. 832). The authors describe the multi-layered contexts that complicate the study of competitive effects, noting that the delivery system of education-teachers-are managed by principals, who receive resources allocated by central office leadership, who are governed by a school board. "While actors in any single layer may feel competitive pressure, this might not ultimately affect the performance of students if the other layers are not equally motivated to improve" (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009, p. 832).

Findings about competitive effects also vary by the intensity of the charter schools' market share of students from a district (Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001; Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). While some researchers have attempted to quantify competitive effect as 6% or more of market share (Carpenter II & Medina, 2011; Hoxby, 2003), Zimmer & Buddin (2009) have found it varies by context and remains unclear "whether competitive pressure is felt when a single charter school appears on the landscape or when charter schools encompass a certain percentage of the market" (p. 832). Inconsistencies in the research are also related to variations in how researchers define and/or measure 'competition' – with some using distance between district schools and charter schools as a proxy (Bettinger, 2005), some using the number of charter schools in a geographic area as a proxy (Teske et al, 2000), and still others using enrollment of students from district schools in a charter school as a proxy for market penetration and competition (Hoxby, 2003; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009).

Additional complexities in studying the competitive effect include the conditions within the local district, the reasons parents choose a charter school, and the types of students who leave district schools for charter schools (Maranto, Hess & Milliman, 2001; Maranto, Milliman & Hess, 2010; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). In areas experiencing population growth such as California, the presence of charter schools may not induce competition, but rather serve as a welcome “relief valve” (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009; p. 836). Several studies have found that, despite the hope that parents would choose charter schools if they demonstrated better academic achievement results, many parents choose charter schools for other reasons – including specialization, size, teacher to student ratios, or diversity (Maranto et al. 2010; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). When reasons for choosing charter schools are not related specifically to academic achievement, the competitive pressure on districts to reform their delivery of instruction is lessened, although they may experience competitive pressure to respond in other ways.

The type of students attracted to attend charter schools from a district may have a strong influence on the competitive effect in districts. As Maranto, Hess and Milliman (2001) found, “Some student losses are more influential than others” (p. 1110). When districts lose high performing students the pressure they face to improve schools is greater, while the loss of low performing students or students requiring more interventions and supports reduces the competitive pressure. In a case study of marketization in Philadelphia, Cucchiara, Gold & Simon (2011) noted a concern about equity of access when it was revealed that the district specifically created attractive choice options for specific kinds of students (offspring of residents of the high rent downtown area) who were prone to exit the district to charter schools, private schools or by relocating to suburbs when their children became school age. At the same time,

the authors note that it became apparent that this same group of parents/community members received more privileged responses from the district policy makers, while community organizers who represented underserved and “deprioritized parts of the city” (p. 2487) had less influence (Cucchiara, Gold, & Simon, 2011).

These findings raise questions about the role of equity and access as well as the purpose of public education. In a case study of one choice school in Louisiana, Beal & Hendry (2012) found that choice “works in complex, contradictory ways to both empower and disempower parents as participatory citizens in democratic change and that market-driven school choice situates parents as consumers and thus redefines education as a private versus public good” (p. 521).

In a study exploring the identity of choosers and the reasons for choosing charter schools, Stein (2009) noted the competitive pressure that school leaders can face when charter school competition emerges. Stein described how a district superintendent publicly advocated for a “moratorium on the opening of new charter schools” because charters were “luring” students away from the district. If it continued he would be required to close buildings and/or eliminate programs or services (Stein, 2009; p. 1).

This superintendent’s public and political response to charter school competition in his district exemplifies one of the many responses district superintendents may enact as a response to charter school competition. According to Linick & Lubienski (2013), “if outside authorizers were coupled with declining enrollments, district leaders were much more likely to perceive the charter school as a challenge and respond with market-oriented strategies” (p. 101). In this case cited by Stein, the superintendent chose to combat the competition by lobbying for legislation to restrict the opening of more charter schools, placed the blame on charter schools for “luring”

students as opposed to committing to examine weaknesses in the district that may be causing parents to look for alternatives, and publicly predicted the need to make cuts to important programs or services as a result of the charter school competition.

The perceptions may not be all negative. Some superintendents may view the charters as a way to elevate pressure on the district schools. “If public schools are overcrowded, they may welcome the charter schools, since they would serve as a release valve” (Imberman, 2011, p. 850). The next section reviews research on the impact of charter schools on district schools’ motivations to innovate through a review of various responses of superintendents of district schools enact in the face of charter school competition. As Zimmer and Buddin (2009) note, it is difficult to ascertain the full effect of charter school competition on superintendent decision-making:

Districts respond to competition to the degree they have an incentive to do so, in the ways they are able, and with the tools they possess. These school systems are not market actors in the sense that private firms traditionally are – they are not seeking to maximize their profitability. Rather, these systems show evidence of trying to reassure their communities, of offering the services the families appear to want, and of seeking to maintain their political legitimacy.... [The] simple assumptions of market response - whether cast positively or negatively - may fail to capture the response of constrained political bodies” (p. 1120).

A review of the literature finds that, although there is the potential for charter schools to influence district schools and there are some indications that district schools have responded to the presence of charters in their district, “there appears to be no direct causal relationship –

counter to what market advocates have assumed-between bringing market mechanisms to education and inducing educational innovation” (Lubienski, 2003, p. 428).

Arguments in favor of charter schools revolve around the idea that competition and choice will foster innovative initiatives in districts that will, in theory, lead to higher student achievement (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Other scholars claim that charter school adoption “would lead to the creation of new schools or the reinvention of existing ones” (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003, p. 319). Both ideas ascribe to the notion proposed by the innovators of the charter school movement that freedom and flexibility would stimulate district schools to change current practices as a way to retain students (Kirst, 1990; Presto et al., 2012). In some respects, this belief has come to fruition in select parts of the country, as scholars believe that district administrators have had no option but to take notice of the practices of charters schools in their backyard. According to Osborne (1999) “Competition forces administrators to take the initiative. If they don’t shake things up, their districts and schools will shrink...charter schools add power to public school choice by creating both new choices and excess capacity in the system” (p.33). Several district schools have selected to respond to the market competition of charter schools by launching innovations with the intention to retain students, teachers and parents (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Maranto, Milliman & Hess, 2010; Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012,).

Innovation as an Output of Competition

As noted previously, most state charter school authorizing statutes reference innovation and replication of innovation in public districts as a primary function of the charter school movement. While innovation may be interpreted in a variety of ways, for the purposes of this

study our team intends to use the word innovation as described by Scott Ellison (2009) who categorized educational innovation as being either administrative or instructional innovation:

Administrative innovation denotes experimentation with and transformation of school organizational models and administrative functions, labor policies and incentive structures, and professional development and training. Instructional innovation denotes experimentation with and the transformation of pedagogical practices, curricular approaches, student assessments and professional collaboration (p. 31).

In many ways, Ellison's separation of administrative and instructional innovation is very similar to the different innovations described by Lubienski, (2003) in which he "distinguished between educational changes (practices regarding curricular content and instructional strategies with immediate impact at the classroom-level) and administrative changes (organization-level practices and structural designs that do not directly affect classroom techniques or content)" (p. 404-5). For the purposes of this review of the literature, Ellison's terminology will serve as the lens through which analysis of specific innovations will occur.

Innovation in charter schools, be it structural, administrative or programmatic, was to influence change within district schools (Carpenter II, 2011; Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001; Winters, 2012; Zimmer, 2009). According to Imberman (2011), "Charter schools have the potential to generate strong incentives for public school administrators and teachers to increase effort and improve student performance" (p. 861-2). Proponents of charter schools have argued for decades that competition in the marketplace would spur innovation – not only by creating new schools where innovation could occur, but also by creating a competitive environment in which district schools would be compelled or motivated to innovate as well. They have noted that charters are in a unique position to influence district schools. Charter schools, free from the

bureaucratic stranglehold that prevents “out of the box” thinking in district schools would have more independence to innovate and those innovations would create a competitive environment in the educational marketplace that would foster innovations across the entire public education system (Garn & Cobb, 2001; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). As stated by Andrews & Rothman (2002):

One of the fundamental reasons for the creation of charter schools was to enable these schools to serve as small laboratories in which innovations could be tried and outcomes brought back to the larger public school system. In Massachusetts, the legislation that created the charter schools is explicit about the need for charter schools to influence other public schools, and replication and innovation are cited among the central purposes for the existence of charter schools (p. 510).

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who spoke to the attendees at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference, stated that, "The charter movement is absolutely one of the most profound changes in American education, bringing new options to underserved communities and introducing competition and innovation into the education system" (2009). Four years later, Secretary Duncan’s message included more critique as he addressed the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools “Delivering on the Dream” conference:

Now, charters are also supposed to be laboratories of innovation. They were to be the [research and development] wing of public education. And while charters have pioneered a number of critical innovations, too many charters still look like traditional public schools, instead of developing and adapting cutting-edge, science- and research-based innovations to accelerate learning. The bottom line is that the charter school brand has to stand for quality, accountability, cost-efficiency, and transparency. ... To fully deliver on

the dream, charters schools must do more to take innovation to scale and continue to tackle the very toughest educational challenges (Duncan, 2013).

Maranto (2006) believes that charter schools have acted as a catalyst to spur change in district schools. In his study, he found that “charter schools do in fact push district schools to improve, most typically by improving public outreach, empowering teachers, providing new curricular options, and replacing ineffective principals and superintendents-all changes somehow not possible before substantial competitive pressures” (p. 138). Ellison (2009) regards this pressure on district schools to innovate as part of a larger effort to expand the conversation surrounding how best to prepare students with the necessary 21st Century skills to compete on a global stage. Ellison sees the argument “grounded in the language of globalization and economic competition, [as] the idea of educational innovation is a response to the perceived need on the part of policy makers for institutional flexibility in public education to meet the changing needs of technology-based economies (2009, p. 30). Numerous scholars have pointed to 21st Century skills as a way to keep students engaged in relevant curriculum (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson, 2011). As charter schools seem to be advancing programs and structures that address these basic 21st century needs, district schools may have had to adjust and reform.

Several innovations taken on by district schools were spurred by witnessing the some of the structural and curricular flexibility allowed for charter schools. Ellison (2009) states that significant innovation is occurring in regards to merit pay and soliciting private capital for schools to enhance programmatic offerings. Other innovations include alternative teacher licensure requirements, creative teacher pay structures, revamped hiring practices that do not require traditional state licensure, and extended learning time opportunities (Bulkley & Fisler,

2003; Podgursky, 2008; RPP, 2001). Parents, in particular, were seen as a unique target for charters. As stated by the U.S. Department of Education in a 2001 report, “although charter schools are a relatively recent phenomenon, a growing body of literature suggests...ways that charter schools might affect the public education system-namely, that charter schools will provide additional choices, especially for those parents and students who traditionally have had the fewest opportunities in the public education system” (RPP, 2001, p. 4; Duncan, 2009; Hanushek et al, 2007). It is this group, the parents, who represent the decision makers in this quasi market. Although they are not the ones who receive the goods, as they are not present in the classroom to receive the instruction, they decide whether to send their children to charter schools. In this way parents exemplify administrative innovation as envisioned by Ellison.

Decision-Maker/Administrative

The concept of the decision maker is similar to that as discussed by Lubienski (2003) who explains that, “charter schools are premised on individual (or family) choices where such choices are thought to best reflect the diverse preferences of the choosers rather than the dictates of monolithic bureaucracies” (p. 398). As choosers participating in a market driven competition, decision-maker innovations fall primarily in the administrative innovation category as defined by Ellison (2009) since these are the changes that most directly impact the relationship between parents and schools. Toma and Zimmer (2012) state that district school superintendents need to understand the rationale of why parents choose charter schools in the first place. “They are not choosing these alternatives because they are required to do so. The choice is voluntary. At least from an *ex ante* perspective, these families, by definition, expect to be better off in the charter schools than in the schools from which they transfer” (p. 211).

Innovations of district schools do not always have to emulate structures used by charter schools. One way that a district school can react to market pressure is through actively combating the presence of a charter in the district. District schools may see charters as a threat to their resources, and for good reason. Many charters, in an effort to attract students and parents, often use aggressive marketing strategies to promote a certain type of curriculum or program. Some of these offerings can be viewed as very traditional in comparison to district schools. According to Ellison (2009) “In the face of market uncertainty and top-down accountability pressures, private actors appear to face strong incentives to introduce marketing techniques to target specific populations and help ‘shape’ their student bodies...it is important to note that the messages used to target high-achieving student populations (or more specifically their families) stress traditional methods, values, and curricula over innovation” (p. 36). In response, the district schools also begin to advertise aggressively. Researchers have noted that the district school innovations that some charter proponents believed would have centered on curriculum and instruction have, instead, gone to new and aggressive forms of marketing campaigns in response to charter schools (Lubienski, 2003; Winters, 2012). This often takes the form of aggressive marketing campaigns by district schools to attract both decision makers and consumers. As described by Ellison,

The primary innovation in administrative functions appears to be the development of educational marketing practices. In contradistinction to the [research and development] laboratory of educational innovation envisaged by the market-model, schools operating in competitive environments face strong incentives to eschew innovative (risky) classroom practices focusing instead on symbolic representation and marketing to shape their student bodies. A competitive educational marketplace would appear to provide strong

incentives for education providers to “shape” their consumers and attract the highest performers in order to maintain market position and ultimately viability. The high costs of educating the lowest performers and the unpredictability of the many externalities that can affect their academic achievement create strong disincentives to service those students (Ellison, 2009, p. 38).

Other scholars have noted marketing campaigns enacted by district schools (Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001).

There are some districts that encourage a greater role for parents and increased autonomy for teachers, yet scholarship has indicated that there is a mixed record of academic success with charter schools (Grady, 2012), leading numerous district schools to be wary of launching innovations (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Academic gains may not be able to be trumpeted, but some charters have been able to attract parents as they focus on health and safety structures. As explained by Maranto (2006), “charters are typically small schools...this impacts safety and *perceived* safety” (p. 135). Schools that demand accountability and an emphasis on standardized tests and even SAT preparation could attract the approval of parents rather than a significant curricular or structural innovation, yet, “these conventional desires can only thwart the forms of innovation that many envisioned at the dawn of the charter school movement” (Welch, 2010, p. 60).

Looking at the reason for the mixed record of student achievement can be complicated which makes it difficult for parents to choose between the competing alternatives. Some researchers would argue that charters attract greater percentages of students that have been traditionally marginalized by the district schools (Winters, 2012; Maranto, 2006). Their academic success has not improved dramatically once they enter the doors of the charter school.

According to Imberman, 2011, “Secondary charters appear to attract students with worse behavior and lower test scores, making this theory consistent with the discipline improvements seen in the public schools” (p. 862). Others argue that test scores should improve dramatically as charters attract students whose parents are motivated to ensure a quality education for their child (Ellison, 2009), resulting in charters that are highly segregated in comparison to district schools, with higher populations of students that are white and wealthy. A review of the literature indicates there is disagreement as to whether curricular and pedagogical innovations in charters directly influence district schools.

Consumer/Instructional Innovation

Consumer innovations fall primarily in the instructional innovation category as defined by Ellison (2009). These are the changes that most directly impact the relationship between students and schools. In response, district schools will make changes to keep the students that they already have. Osborne, in his 1999 study, inquired into the root cause of districts making changes. He found that when charters took a significant amount of funding and other resources away from public schools, districts would usually make changes. The struggle over resources often influences decisions made by districts (Lubienski, 2003; Winters, 2012). “When strong charter operators are competing for desirable students...district schools will be under relatively intense pressure to respond. Conversely, districts feel less need to respond to charter schools that have trouble retaining students” (Maranto et al. 2001; p. 1120).

District schools often reacted to market competition by implementing changes (Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998; RPP, 2001) that Ellison would describe as innovative curricular approaches, such as all-day kindergarten, before and after school programs, and additions to technology offerings (Osborne, 1999; Rofes, 1998). One hope was that charter schools would spur

curricular and instructional innovation in the district schools. Lubienski's (2006) investigation of district schools' responses to charter schools found that there was not a tremendous amount of innovation occurring in district schools as a result of charter schools. Others however report that changes in district schools do occur with regard to student achievement (Winters, 2012), but this is not due to any curricular innovation, but rather due to the fact that students who leave public schools and enroll in charter schools may not have been performing well academically in district schools. Other scholars, such as Ellison (2009), do not really see innovation with instruction but that perhaps the market is forcing teaching and learning through collaborative models. He states that "to ensure that innovations generated at the school level are spread throughout the system, policy makers need to foster the development of school networks by providing ample opportunities for continuous professional development, collaboration, mentoring, and training programs" (p.44).

There is some evidence that the collaborative culture established in some charter schools amongst the staff is serving as a model for district schools. As Welch (2010) explains, "pockets of innovation are difficult to create, scale, and sustain-not just across districts but within buildings. Collaborative cultures have the power to address each of these concerns by growing and sustaining improvement, but only if teachers have the opportunity to genuinely interact with each other's practice and ideas" (p. 62). This evidence of increased collaboration has led some district schools to reach out to charters to enhance their own instructional innovations, and potentially as a way to keep students.

Although there may be some mistrust and suspicion surrounding the relationship between charters and districts (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Finkel, 2011; RPP, 2001), and there is evidence that some district schools' facilities were shuttered due to the influx of charters in a

district (RPP, 2001), there has also been evidence of district schools and charter schools sharing resources to enhance students learning (Ellison, 2009). As explained in a 2001 U.S. Department of Education study, “Districts that viewed charter schools as an opportunity and made changes in education tended to describe charter schools as a catalyst for change-some were collaborating with charter school staff and others viewed charter schools as an opportunity to learn” (RPP, 2001, p. 37). Finkel, in his 2011 article entitled *District-Charter Collaborations on the Rise*, cites Jim Hill, senior policy analyst for the National School Board Association’s Center for Public Education. Hill “says collaborations thus far have been more likely to be around administrative services, such as shared facilities and food service contracting” (p. 64). In some instances, however, district schools respond to charters by launching initiatives that encourage collaboration, often with a specific focus on teaching and learning (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Rofes, 1998) As Lee (2009), mentions in his analysis of whether the presence of charters encourage efficiency in district schools,

The simple market theory may not be empirically supported, which presumes that the existence of charter schools will yield a more competitive environment in the public school system. Districts may respond to competition in various ways. For instance, regular public schools may wish to cooperate with charter schools if charter schools are taking disadvantaged students from the regular public schools (p. 54).

Numerous charter advocates envisioned this transformation of district collaborative programs and policies at the genesis of the charter school discussion almost 20 years ago (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012; Osborne, 1999).

Massachusetts in particular has a number of district innovations targeting teaching and learning that came about primarily through collaboration with a charter school. As Ed Finkel (2011) explains,

Recent collaboration examples include the Match School in Boston, which houses Ameri-Corps-affiliated teachers on its top floor who work in several Boston public schools in addition to the charter school....He [Dominic Slowey, spokesman for the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association] also mentions a project among Prospect Hill Academy and public schools in Somerville, Mass., who have shared teachers to spread best teaching practices in the classroom (p. 66).

Ellison (2009) speculates that the reason behind teacher driven collaboration in district schools is due to the fact that the market may not encourage risk taking within the district school setting, for if a district innovation is considered a failure, students may decide to leave. It is important to recognize, however, that the market forces at work do not solely impact the district school.

Charter schools can also gain through the relationship. As explained by Andrews & Rothman (2002), “Charter schools can clearly benefit from interacting with district schools, which often bring their own innovative ideas as well as the wisdom of experience” (p. 510).

There is evidence that some district leaders have not altered their academic programs or launched other innovations in the face of market competition from charter schools. According to Rofes (1998), “few superintendents, principals, and teachers in district schools were thinking of charter schools as educational laboratories or attempting to transfer pedagogical innovations from charters to the district schools” (p.13). Other district schools actively compete and may shift resources to target specific students within the district school population that are not attracted to charters (Imberman, 2011). There are reports, however, that indicate some

superintendents recognize the opportunity for district school innovation as a result of charters. “In some districts, district leaders reported that charter schools created additional choice options for students and parents, and that the leaders supported choice” (RPP, 2001, p. 32). Other reports indicate that some superintendents believe the charter schools duplicate curricular practices covered in district schools, that charter schools are not particularly innovative and cannot be considered the learning lab they were designed to be as part of the initial legislation (Lubienski, 2006; Maranto, Hess, & Milliman, 2001; Plank & Sykes, 1999; Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2011; Teske et al., 2000; Welch, 2010). Until the results of charter school success are conclusive, many districts may be waiting to launch a new initiative.

Another area that distinguishes charter schools is that of school-level decision-making surrounding curriculum, as charter schools provide greater teacher autonomy around what is taught and how it is taught (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; Lubienski, 2003; RPP, 2001). There are numerous concepts of autonomy, but for the purposes of this review of the literature, we refer to how the concept is framed by Finnigan (2007). He states that, “the usefulness or value of autonomy does not lie in autonomy for its own sake but in the freedom it affords schools to do things that previously were not allowed or available” (p. 505). In regards to instructional innovation, the autonomy provided by the charters can transfer directly to curricular and pedagogical freedom that could impact student learning. According to Lubienski, “based on the evidence in the research on charter practices, charter schools appear to be using administrative autonomy to experiment with many structural and programmatic approaches” (2003, p. 412). Teachers in charter schools report greater influence over academic standards and curriculum compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools (Finnigan, 2007; Maranto 2006; Podgursky, 2008). Welch (2010) explains, “Charters were meant to allow for autonomy

in pursuit of performance. If autonomy and efficiency are available in several areas, even those less visible to lay observers, these factors are equally important to the potential use of alternative pedagogies like projects and collaborative groups” (p.61). Welch also indicates that curricular innovations are often hindered by traditional systems of accountability including state achievement tests. This increased autonomy may directly impact how programs are taught at the district level. There are reports that district schools did alter their curriculum due to the presence of charters (Maranto et al. 2001; RPP, 2001), but the results are inconclusive (Lubienski, 2003).

Maranto et al (2001) call for a more in-depth investigation into how districts may react to the presence of charters. “Our greatest hope for this work is that it may spur other researchers to begin scrutinizing more carefully the nature and causes of competitive response across a wide range of school districts” (p. 1123). Ellison (2009) believes that researchers should investigate “what is happening on the ground...how do educational actors (i.e. teachers, administrators, parents, students, etc.) view innovation? Do they see innovation emerging in their schools?” (p. 46). By interviewing district superintendents, to understand their perception of charters and to see if this has led to any innovations in their school in response to this competitive educational marketplace, our study will hopefully contribute to the current gap in the literature.

Charter Schools in Massachusetts

Consistent with the charter school laws across the nation, the charter school law in Massachusetts identified innovation and influence on the improvement of traditional public schools as primary to the purpose and vision for the charter system. The charter school law in Massachusetts was authorized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Education Reform Act (1993), through the passage of Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 which asserts the purpose and intent of the statute (emphasis added):

(b) The purposes of establishing charter schools are: (i) to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education; (ii) to provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessments; (iii) to provide parents and students with greater options in selecting schools within and outside their school districts; (iv) to provide teachers with a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction and school structure and management; (v) to encourage performance-based educational programs; (vi) to hold teachers and school administrators accountable for students' educational outcomes; and (vii) to provide models for replication in other public schools.

As Andrews and Rothman (2002) describe, innovation and experimentation within the charter schools themselves was one step in the larger push to influence reforms within the larger public system as a whole.

One of the fundamental reasons for the creation of charter schools was to enable these schools to serve as small laboratories in which innovations could be tried and outcomes brought back to the larger public school system. In Massachusetts, the legislation that created the charter schools is explicit about the need for charter schools to influence other public schools, and replication and innovation are cited among the central purposes for the existence of charter schools” (p. 510).

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) (2013):

A charter school is a public school that is managed by a board of trustees and operates independently of any school committee under a five-year charter granted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. It has the freedom to

organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method and to control its own budget and hire (and fire) teachers and staff. In return for this freedom, a charter must attract students and produce positive results within five years of its charter or its charter will not be renewed. The first Massachusetts charter schools opened in 1995 (p. 1).

In Massachusetts there are two basic categories of authorized charter schools- Commonwealth Charter Schools and Horace Mann Charter Schools. Commonwealth Charter Schools are public institutions that are independent from traditional public districts; Horace Mann Charter Schools operate with a memorandum of agreement with public districts. In 2010, coinciding with Massachusetts' attempt to secure Race to the Top (RTTT) funds, Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 was amended to specify distinctions in the types of relationships between districts (particularly those in corrective action with the state as a result of achievement results on standardized assessments) and three types of Horace Mann Charter Schools (MA DESE, 2013).

Charter schools were envisioned, as indicated in the Massachusetts legislative intent, as institutions designed to test innovations, refine and then share best practices with public districts so that public districts could replicate those practices and more efficiently undertake improvement and reform activities. Although the word “laboratory” is not used explicitly in the legislation, the development of innovations and call for charter schools to develop models for replication conjure a public image that charter schools will act as laboratories – experimenting with innovation that districts will then be able to replicate. This notion of piloting, sharing and replicating did not fully account for the notion of competition that was at the heart of the charter school movement and in fact, implies collaboration or sharing of information in ways not

addressed fully in the literature, which focuses more on the notion that competition for students would translate into competition for funds. In Massachusetts, the funding methodology enacted by the charter school law sparked a heated debate that still lingers in the Massachusetts public education arena. As charter school proliferation increases with more charter schools in existence, more students enrolling in charter schools, and more students on waiting lists-this debate continues to evolve in Massachusetts.

In 1995, 15 charter schools opened serving 2,613 students in the first year. According to the MA DESE (2013) pre-enrollment report, it was anticipated that 35,353 students would enroll in 81 charter schools in the 2013-2014 school year. In less than 20 years, there are now more than four times as many charter schools as in 1995 and charter schools enroll more than 12 times as many students as they did in 1995. Figures 2-1 and Figure 2-2 display the growth of charter schools and enrollment between 1995 and 2014.

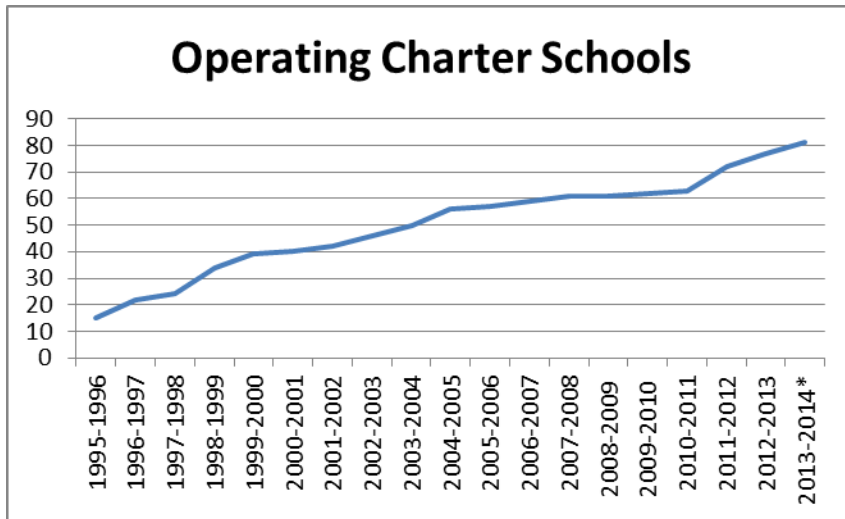


Figure 2-1

Growth of Charter Schools in Massachusetts 1995-2014

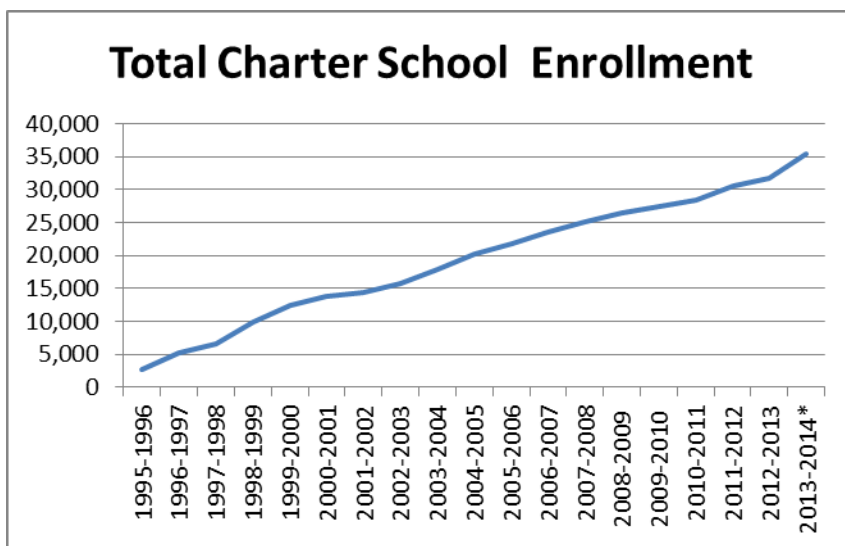


Figure 2-2

Charter School Enrollment in Massachusetts 1995-2014

The MA DESE began collecting and reporting data about the number of students on waiting lists for charter schools in 2002. The number of students seeking enrollment but placed on waiting lists has grown significantly during the last decade; in 2011-2012 the number of students on waiting lists surpassed the actual enrollment of students. While this trend has been increasing, the total enrollment of public education students in Massachusetts has declined during the last decade (Table 2-1).

According to MA DESE statistics (2013), the demand for a charter school placement in Massachusetts has far exceeded the supply since the Department started collecting enrollment and waitlist data in 2002. In the 2013-2014 school year, 31,830 students are enrolled in public charter schools-representing an estimated 3.3% of Massachusetts' public school students. An additional 45,176 students were on waiting lists for enrollment in charter schools-representing an additional estimated 4.8% of Massachusetts public students. Combined, this means that 82,389, or an estimated 8.6% of Massachusetts public students, sought enrollment in charter public schools for the 2013-2014 school year (Table 2-1 and Figure 2-3).

Table 2-1

Charter School Enrollment, Waitlist and Percentage of Market Share in Massachusetts 2002-2014 (MA DESE, 2013a).

| | All public students in Massachusetts | Total Enrollment in Charter Schools | % of all MA students enrolled in Charters | Students on Waitlist for Charter Schools | Enrolled + Waitlist Combined | % of Charter School Choosers |
|-----------|--|--|---|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2002-2003 | 983,313 | 15,805 | 1.6% | 12,959 | 28,764 | 2.9% |
| 2003-2004 | 980,818 | 17,869 | 1.8% | 13,153 | 31,022 | 3.2% |
| 2004-2005 | 975,911 | 20,259 | 2.1% | 14,709 | 34,968 | 3.6% |
| 2005-2006 | 972,371 | 21,866 | 2.2% | 15,823 | 37,689 | 3.9% |
| 2006-2007 | 968,661 | 23,500 | 2.4% | 16,004 | 39,504 | 4.1% |
| 2007-2008 | 962,806 | 25,034 | 2.6% | 18,989 | 44,023 | 4.6% |
| 2008-2009 | 958,910 | 26,384 | 2.8% | 21,312 | 47,696 | 5.0% |
| 2009-2010 | 957,053 | 27,393 | 2.9% | 24,066 | 51,459 | 5.4% |
| 2010-2011 | 955,563 | 28,422 | 3.0% | 26,708 | 55,130 | 5.8% |
| 2011-2012 | 953,369 | 30,595 | 3.2% | 35,942 | 66,537 | 7.0% |
| 2012-2013 | 954,773 | 31,830 | 3.3% | 45,176 | 77,006 | 8.1% |
| 2013-2014 | 955,739 | 31,997 | 3.4% | 50,392 | 82,389 | 8.6% |

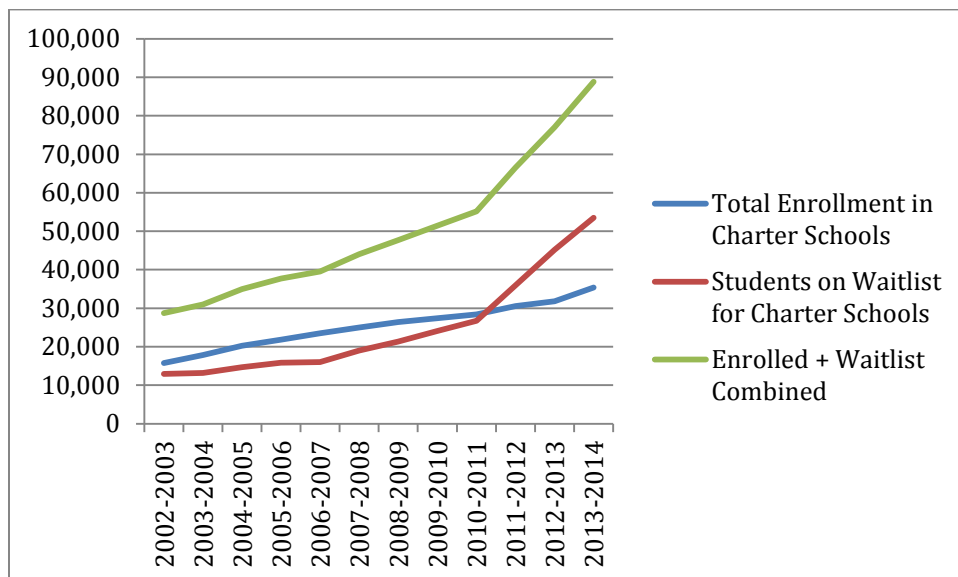


Figure 2-3

Graphic Display of Charter School Enrollment and Waitlist in Massachusetts 2002-2014

Charter School Caps and Limitations

In Massachusetts, the charter school law limits the number of charters by type and location that the Board can grant, with intent to ensure that charter schools are predominantly addressing unmet needs in the public education system—largely promoting charter schools that serve urban or high need areas. In 2013-2014, 62 out of 81 (77%) operating Commonwealth charter schools are located in urban districts; 27 (33%) of these operate in Boston. The legislation prioritizes urban and underperforming districts for the development of new Commonwealth charter schools. According to MGL Ch. 71, Section 89 (2010):

In any one year, the Board may approve only one regional Commonwealth charter school application to be located in a district where overall student performance on the MCAS was in the top 10% in the preceding year.... The Board may not approve a charter in any community with a population of less than 30,000 as determined by the most recent US Census estimate, unless it is a regional charter

school. ...At least 2 charters approved in any year must be granted for charter schools located in districts where overall student performance on the MCAS is in the lowest 10 % state wide in the two years prior to the applications.

In 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap-which launched several education reform initiatives-including revisions to the Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89, the Charter School Law. The passage of this Act ushered in a host of initiatives in public schools in Massachusetts but also effectively served to increase the number of charter schools and charter students in high needs areas, and to increase accountability within charter schools to serve previously underserved populations. In response to the enrollment trends showing the under-representation of English Language Learners (ELLs) and Special Education students in charter schools and reports of returning students to traditional public schools, when the charter school enabling statute was revised as part of the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap (2010), charter schools were required to demonstrate outreach to high needs families and efforts to recruit and sustain enrollment of a more diverse student body, more representative of the demographics of the sending communities. Important components of the revisions to the Charter School Law (2010) include the requirement that the “charter” of the school addresses “the school’s capacity to address the particular needs of limited English-proficient students...including the employment of staff,” includes a “statement of equal educational opportunity which shall state that charter schools shall be open to all students, on a space available basis, and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or academic achievement,” develops a “student recruitment and retention plan” that includes “deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to ensure the provision of equal educational opportunity”

and that is designed “to attract, enroll and retain a student population that, when compared to students in similar grades in schools from which the charter school is expected to enroll students, contains a comparable academic and demographic profile” and that includes a “detailed description of deliberate, specific strategies the school will use to maximize the number of students who successfully complete all school requirements and prevent students from dropping out.

Table 2-2 displays selected demographic data for charter schools in the aggregate compared to state averages between 2006 and 2013-three years preceding the amendment of Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89 (2010) and three years following its passage. Following the amendment of the charter school law in Massachusetts, it is evident that, in the aggregate, the percentage of as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students (also referred to as English language learners) and Special Education students enrolled in charter schools has increased. Between 2006 and 2011, the aggregate percentage of LEP students enrolled in charter schools ranged from 1.5%-2.2% lower than the state average but in 2012-2013 the difference had been decreased to 0.4%. In 2010, the year of the amendment of the charter school law, the percentage of special education students in charter schools lagged behind the state average by 5.2%; in 2013 this had been decreased to 3.7%. It is important to note that Table 2-2 displays aggregate data; individual charter school demographic data varies greatly.

Table 2-2

Massachusetts Aggregate Charter School and State Student Demographics 2006-2013 (MA DESE) (2013a).

| <u>School Year</u> | <u>% Limited English Proficient</u> | | <u>%Low Income</u> | | <u>% Special Education</u> | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| | <u>Charter</u> | <u>State</u> | <u>Charter</u> | <u>State</u> | <u>Charter</u> | <u>State</u> |
| 2006-2007 | 3.7 | 5.6 | 45.2 | 28.9 | 12.0 | 16.9 |
| 2007-2008 | 4.1 | 5.8 | 44.3 | 29.5 | 11.8 | 16.9 |
| 2008-2009 | 4.0 | 5.9 | 45.8 | 30.7 | 11.9 | 17.0 |
| ^a 2009-2010 | 4.4 | 6.2 | 46.9 | 32.9 | 11.8 | 17.0 |
| 2010-2011 | 4.9 | 7.1 | 50.0 | 34.2 | 12.1 | 17.0 |
| 2011-2012 | 6.0 | 7.3 | 51.4 | 35.2 | 13.1 | 17.0 |
| 2012-2013 | 7.3 | 7.7 | 53.0 | 37.0 | 13.3 | 17.0 |

^aYear of Charter School Law Amendment

Funding for School Choice Options

In Massachusetts, there are a variety of school choice options that impact the competitive environment for traditional public school students. There are complex nuances to the funding formulas applied in Massachusetts for the various school choice options. In addition to charter schools, other choices exist in various formats and depending upon local education options.

Public school choice options in Massachusetts include voluntary desegregation through Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO), voluntary in-district school choice for districts large enough to have capacity to offer choices, voluntary out-of-district school choice for districts willing to open seats to students from other districts, and public regional vocational technical or vocational agricultural high schools. All of these public school choice options provide additional complexity in understanding the impact of the competitive marketplace resulting from charter school choice in Massachusetts. However, the funding for each of the school choice options in Massachusetts compared to the funding mechanism for charter school enrollment may have a significant impact on the perceptions of superintendents about charter schools and the competitive pressure they experience as a result of charter schools.

The charter school debate in Massachusetts has been largely centered on the funding mechanism established by the authorizing statute, Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, §89 (2010) and the implementation through the charter school authorizing department and the finance department of the MA DESE. In Massachusetts, the professional organization for superintendents - Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the professional organization for school committees-the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) have been vocal opponents of the implementation of the charter school law because of the funding and local input resulting from the implementation. MASS and MASC criticized the law for unfairly distributing local funds from districts to charter schools, and for unfairly omitting public input in the charter authorizing process (MASS, 2005). In a position statement presented by MASS (2005), the organization repetitively refers to the charter school movement as an ‘experiment’ and criticizes the DESE for unfair funding formulas, for inadequate involvement of local stakeholders in the charter application process, and for inadequate monitoring of the quality of charter schools (MASS, 2005).

According to DESE (2013), for each student enrolled in a Commonwealth Charter School the charter school receives a tuition amount from the state that is equal to the district’s per-pupil amount calculated by the Department’s School Finance Unit. The state then deducts that same amount from the sending districts’ state aid allocation. In FY12, the state average per pupil amount was \$13,656.24 (DESE, 2012). Table 2-3 displays the Massachusetts average per pupil expenditures from 2004-2005 to 2011-2013 (DESE, 2012). In configuring the per-pupil expenditures, all in-district and out-of-district pupils and expenditures are included; this means that high cost special education expenditures and high need student expenditures are included in the average per-pupil expenditure rate. In addition to the per pupil rate to fund enrollment in charter schools, the Massachusetts statute requires the district to provide district-funded

transportation to students attending charter schools. This cost is in addition to the per-pupil cost, and has greater impact for districts with students attending regional charter schools that are not located within the same district. As noted in the statute:

All students who reside in the school district in which a charter school is located shall be provided transportation by the district, provided that either (i) transportation is provided to district students in the same grade, or (ii) transportation is required by the students individualized education program....

(Mass. Gen. Law, Ch. 71, § 89).

Table 2-3

Massachusetts Per Pupil Expenditure Average 2006-2014

| Year | MA per-pupil expenditure average |
|------|----------------------------------|
| FY06 | \$10,600 |
| FY07 | \$11,210 |
| FY08 | \$11,858 |
| FY09 | \$12,448 |
| FY10 | \$13,006 |
| FY11 | \$13,047 |
| FY12 | \$13,357 |

In FY12, \$254,844,899 was allocated to charter schools through diverting that same amount in local aid from public districts to charter schools based upon the enrollment of students from each district in a charter school (DESE, 2013a).

Chapter 46 of Massachusetts General Law (1997) provides some relief mechanisms to districts when they experience a significant increase in charter school tuitions (often as a result of the opening or initial proliferation of a charter school), which enables districts to receive aid that offsets, or reimburses a portion of the increase in the charter school tuition expense from one fiscal year to the next fiscal year through Chapter 46 aid. Additionally, there is a statutory limit on the amount of funds that can be transferred to charter schools from any one district for the

purpose of charter school tuition. A district's total charter school tuition payment cannot exceed 9% of that districts' net school spending (NSS), unless that district has performed in the lowest 10% statewide on the MCAS for the previous two years. If the district is in the lowest 10% the cap on NSS was raised to 13% in 2011 and is scheduled to increase by 1% each year until reaching the cap of 18%.

As noted earlier, Horace Mann Charter Schools represent a unique charter/district relationship that results from a memorandum of agreement with the district, with a total budget allocation approved by the public district's school committee following a budget request from the charter school's board of trustees. There are mechanisms in place to allow the charter board of trustees and the district school committee to negotiate budget allocation and to seek mediation if needed.

Funding for Out-of-District School Choice

School choice between districts is another unique consideration when studying the public education marketplace in Massachusetts. During the 2013-2014 school year, 173 Massachusetts school districts opted to receive school choice students from other districts, resulting in 13,699 students participating in inter-district school choice (Table 2.4).

Table 2-4

Massachusetts Student Participation in Inter-District School Choice and State-Wide Inter-District Tuition Expenses 2005-2014

| FY | Pupils (FTE) | Tuition |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 2005 | 9,276.49 | \$51,547,137 |
| 2006 | 9,734.99 | \$55,592,918 |
| 2007 | 10,345.38 | \$59,475,401 |
| 2008 | 10,790.07 | \$62,019,695 |
| 2009 | 11,300.23 | \$65,515,723 |
| 2010 | 11,806.30 | \$67,917,121 |
| 2011 | 12,195.25 | \$70,310,745 |
| 2012 | 12,892.03 | \$74,110,559 |
| 2013 | 13,362.35 | \$77,830,482 |
| 2014 | 13,699.00 | \$79,800,149 |

While there is likely a competitive impact for districts, particularly for districts with lower student achievement that are adjacent to higher performing districts that have opened school choice enrollment, the funding mechanisms in place to support out of district school choice are significantly divergent from the funding for charter school enrollment. School choice tuition charges are based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students multiplied by the per-pupil tuition rate, minus 75% of the per-pupil cost, up to a limit of \$5,000 (DESE, 2012). At most, sending districts will lose \$5,000 in state aid for typical students enrolling in other districts through school choice. In addition, transportation is not provided by local districts for students choosing to enroll in another district via school choice. For students with IEPs, the state has assigned special education increment funding adjustments that augment the school choice tuition to support the receiving district in meeting the needs of students with special education entitlements (DESE, 2004).


The distance between the per pupil funding for students enrolling in out of district public school choice (\$5,000) and those enrolling in commonwealth charter schools (average of \$13,656 in FY12) with the addition of costs associated with transportation for students attending commonwealth charter schools is important to note in the study of the competitive marketplace impacted by charter schools. In addition, it is important to note that the enrollment of special education students (associated with per pupil higher costs) in charter schools is below the state average for percentages of students.

In 2011, the DESE commissioned a study (Cohodes et al, 2011) to promote the best practices taking place in some charter schools in Massachusetts. In the introductory letter, the DESE Commissioner, Mitchell Chester, noted that the findings were “provocative” and lauded the innovations taking place in charter schools stating that “Longer school days, more instructional time on core content, a ‘no excuses’ philosophy, and other structural elements of school organization appear to contribute to the positive results from these schools. Perhaps most importantly, many of these elements could be implemented in traditional public schools, providing us with potential models for improvement across the Commonwealth.”

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Our study employed mixed methods (MM) design because we sought to draw upon the strengths of both qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) data (Creswell, 2012). We collected QUAN data through the distribution of a state-wide survey of Massachusetts superintendents to identify trends in superintendents' perceptions about the impact of charter school competition on their decisions and actions. During our pilot test of the survey, pilot testers suggested that we add more open response items to the survey, which resulted in QUAL data within the survey tool. We used the survey data to inform the refinement of a semi-structured interview protocol that was used to collect additional QUAL data that deepened our understanding by providing contextual details that support, explain, or diverge from trends that emerged in the QUAN data. The QUAN source (survey) enabled us to reach a larger audience to facilitate generalization of results, while the QUAL source (open response survey items and interviews) added narrative, details and context to assist us in answering our research questions.

We used different kinds of data to investigate the same phenomena – also known as triangulation (Jick, 1979). We collected our QUAN and QUAL data in two phases so that our sources of data complement and strengthen each other (Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). We viewed both data types as primary to our investigation, though collected the QUAN data first (through distribution of the survey); analysis of the QUAN data then resulted in initial themes and findings which influenced our protocol for the QUAL portion of the study (semi-structured interviews). Using Morse's (1991; as cited in Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) MM notation system, our survey design is notated as below indicating that we executed a sequential, two-phase study starting with QUAN methods, followed by QUAL methods with both sources sharing equal importance to our design: QUAN  QUAL.

We analyzed all sources of data separately, but we also combined or “mixed” the data to finalize our findings through triangulation of data sources on the same phenomena. In addition, we used data from both sources to respond to each of our research questions and sub-questions.

The research design described above can be classified as explanatory sequential mixed method design (often referred to as a two-phase model) because it consists of two distinct phases that occur chronologically: starting with QUAN data collection and followed by QUAL data collection which is used to refine the results from the QUAN phase (Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Typically, the explanatory sequential mixed method is used when a researcher needs QUAL data to explain or expand on QUAN results (Creswell, 2006; Creswell, 2012). In this model, the researcher identifies specific QUAN findings that need an explanation, such as statistical differences among groups or unexpected results, and collects QUAL data from participants who can best help explain these findings. The rationale for this approach is that the QUAN data and analysis provide a broad picture of the research problem, while the QUAL data and analysis refine and explain statistical results by exploring participants’ views in more depth (Creswell, 2012).

Stages and timeline. Our study included the following elements and timeline. Figure 3-1 displays the stages of our research design.

1. Survey design (conceptualization)
2. Pilot test & refine survey tool using Qualtrics (August 2013)
3. Distribute survey (via Qualtrics) to all superintendents through MASS (September 2013)
4. Code responses & analyze data (November 2013)
5. Use survey to select sample of superintendents for interviews (November 2013)
6. Identify key findings/themes from survey (September/October 2013)

7. Refine interview protocol and a priori code list (located in Domain Map) based on survey themes (October 2013)
8. Pilot test & refine interview protocol (October 2013)
9. Conduct 9 audio-recorded interviews with superintendents (October-December 2013)
10. Transcribe, code, and analyze data - using Dedoose (December 2103)
11. Triangulate data between quantitative questions on survey, qualitative questions on survey, and qualitative data from interviews (December 2013)
12. Findings and recommendations to MASS (January 2014)

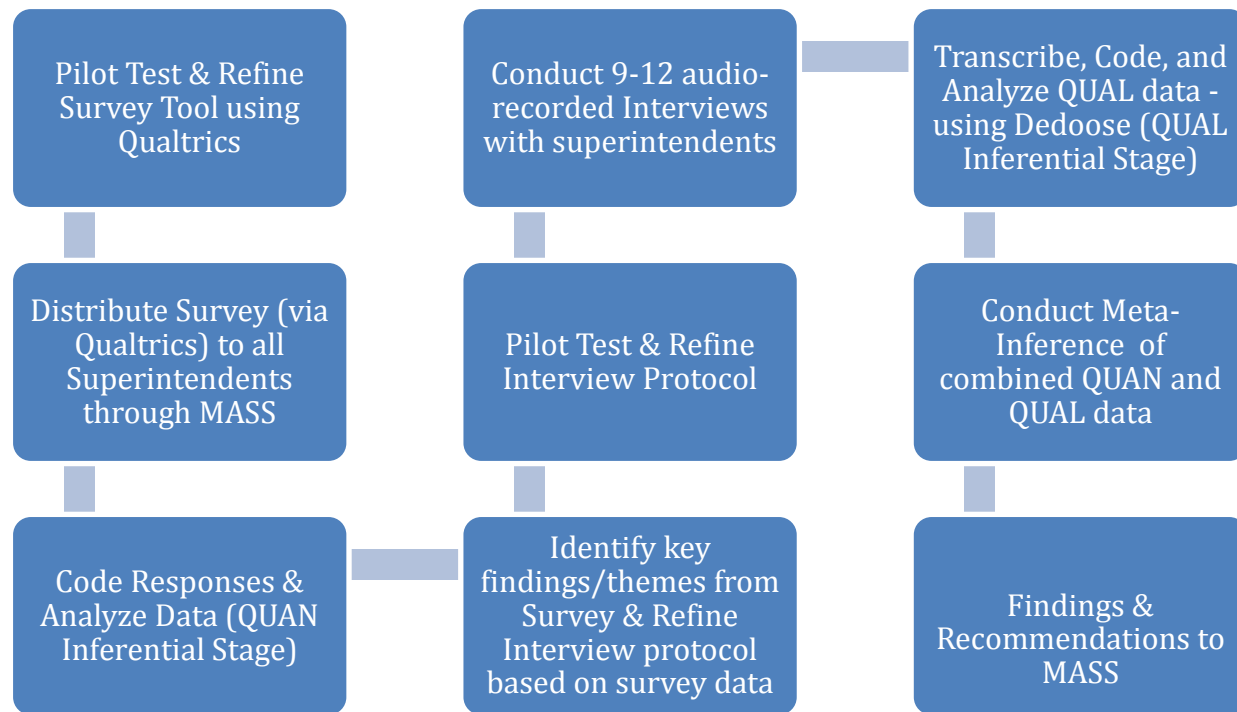


Figure 3-1

Stages of Research

Survey Design. To design our survey, we first needed to identify our population, our sampling frame, and our sample (Creswell, 2012; Groves et al, 2004). Our population was superintendents in traditional public school districts, our target population or sampling frame was superintendents in Massachusetts, and our sample was superintendents in Massachusetts who lead districts in which students are eligible to enroll in one or more charter schools (Creswell, 2012). To reach our target population, we distributed our survey to all superintendents in Massachusetts, leveraging our partnership with the state superintendents' association. To derive our sample, we asked superintendents to identify if there is a charter school option available to the students in their district. We then filtered out superintendents who respond "no" to that question, leaving our sample as those who answered "yes" to that question, who were then prompted to complete the rest of the survey as "respondents" (Grove et al, 2004, p. 45).

The survey used was a web-based questionnaire using survey software (Qualtrics). We selected this survey method because it could be deployed efficiently, was convenient for potential respondents, and because the survey data could be gathered quickly (Creswell, 2012). Our survey instrument included "clear, unambiguous questions" (Creswell, 2012; p. 382) that alternate between question types - personal, attitudinal and behavioral questions and closed- and open-ended questions. Our survey was designed to identify superintendents' perceptions of charter schools and charter school competition, the nature and types of competitive pressure experienced by superintendents in relation to charter school competition, and a review of district-level innovative responses to charter school competition as reported by superintendents. The questions are based upon our review of the literature.

In designing our survey tool, in the conceptual phase of developing our methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), we used a cross-sectional survey design; our protocol is located in Appendix A. This cross-sectional survey design "has the advantage of measuring current

attitudes and practices” (Creswell, 2012, p. 377). We designed our survey to collect perceptual data about the views, attitudes, and self-reported actions of superintendents in Massachusetts in response to competition from charter schools. The construct we sought to measure through the survey includes the perceived impact of charter school competition on superintendents’ decision-making and action. According to Groves et al (2004), “Constructs are the elements of information that are sought by the researcher” (p. 41). The design of our survey is critical as Groves et al (2004) note “without a good design, good survey statistics rarely result” (p. 41).

To measure our construct, we developed questions that yield measurements. To this end, we asked superintendents to report their perceptions of the impact of charter schools on the district, with a matrix of drop down menus that categorized potential impacts and asked superintendents to rate their perception of the impact using a rating scale of *No Impact*, *Low Impact*, *Moderate Impact*, and *High Impact*. We asked this question to identify if superintendents perceive a competitive effect as a result of the presence of charter schools. Low impact ratings indicated a perception that charter schools are not resulting in a feeling of competitiveness from superintendents, while high impact ratings indicated a strong competitive effect.

We also asked superintendents to report their perception about the likelihood of specific categories of students to enroll in charter schools (with categories of students using MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education sub groups and achievement categories) and a ratings scale ranging from *Minimally Likely* to *Highly Likely*. We sought answers to this question to identify if superintendents perceive that charter schools are attracting specific groups of students more than others, and how this may vary throughout the state. In addition, we asked superintendents about their perception of the reasons parents choose to seek enrollment in charter schools using a drop down menu of options that are based upon our review of the literature about

why parents seek choices. Answers to this question assisted us in understanding the superintendents' perceptions about why they believe parents are seeking charter school enrollment. Lastly, we asked superintendents to report what, if any, actions or initiatives they have prioritized in their district partly in response to competition from charter schools, using a drop down menu of categories of responses. The drop down menu included categories based upon our review of the literature which described a variety of responses including but not limited to no action, undertaking anti-charter advocacy, developing new programs, adopting new curriculum, and launching strategic communications.

In the survey, we asked superintendents to voluntarily identify their districts so that we could explore statewide data patterns as being from urban, suburban, and rural districts, and to also associate them with a regional Superintendents' Roundtable Association. We did not identify districts by name in the study. We also used the survey to capture other information about the superintendents' districts, including size of district, type of community (suburban, urban, rural), estimated percentage of students attending charter schools, and regional geography in Massachusetts. When analyzing our data, research team members applied pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of our participants.

To ensure that our questions were clear and measured what we sought to measure, we pilot tested our instrument with a small group of colleagues who functioned in the role of or a similar role to a superintendent. We revised the survey based upon their feedback.

Pilot Test of Survey. In August, our research team conducted a pilot test of our survey tool with eight Massachusetts superintendents. Pilot testing is important to ensure that questions can be interpreted by survey takers asking what we intended to ask to ensure that we were able to gather meaningful data in pursuit of our research questions. We relied on our professional networks and relationships with practicing superintendents to recruit participants for our pilot

test. Pilot test participants were asked to trial the survey by submitting a survey response online and to then provide us feedback about the content of the survey questions and prompts. We asked participants to alert us to any misleading or ambiguous questions, questions that included emotionally loaded or vaguely defined words, any questions that participants feel would not yield truthful responses, and if there were questions that might leave respondents feeling vulnerable about a negative consequence for answering a question in a particular manner. We also asked our pilot test participants to provide input about the content of our questions particularly in light of our research questions. We requested feedback about the response choices we provided to ensure that the terminology we used was transparent and widely accepted as well as comprehensive enough to allow for a range of responses that would strengthen the reliability and validity of our data (Walonick, 2004). As a result of our pilot test and suggestions from our pilot testers, we revised the wording of several questions, added options to drop down menus, and provided more opportunities for open responses.

Our survey tool included questions that we designed to be sensitive to demographic differences among respondents such as urban/rural and affluent/poor variance; we sought feedback from our pilot testers to confirm that we achieved this goal. We asked pilot testers to confirm that the questions flowed in a logical order. We designed our tool to include less than 20 questions because we were cognizant of the time limitations of district superintendents; we solicited feedback from the pilot testers about the amount of time it took to complete the survey and learned that it took them less than 20 minutes, averaging approximately 10 minutes depending on how much information they provided in open response questions. We asked our pilot testers if asking the superintendent to name his/her district could cause respondents not to be candid about their responses, and pilot testers expressed that making this item optional would

remove that barrier, though they generally did not think that this would be a concern for survey takers.

Distribution of Survey. To avoid some of the potential methodological issues that can arise by using web-based surveys, we coordinated our efforts to get the survey out to all superintendents in Massachusetts by working in partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS). The MASS Executive Director agreed to send the survey link out to the membership of Massachusetts and to encourage superintendents to respond to the survey. The method for sending out the survey and the message that accompanied it was not executed the way we had designed it, however; this is noted in our limitations section. This method of delivery to superintendents ensured that email addresses were current, lent credibility to our study, and promoted participation by members of our sample in order to maximize our response rate and thus validity of data (Creswell, 2012).

Analysis of Survey Data. After survey collection was complete, we calculated response rate and generated “descriptive report[s] [of] aggregate responses to each item on the questionnaire” (Creswell, 2012, p. 398) in order to locate general patterns and themes. After data collection, we edited and coded our data and placed it into a form “suitable for analysis” (Groves et al, 2004, p. 48). Given our sample size (61) we determined to analyze the data applying descriptive statistical analysis. Using filters, reports and cross tabulations functions in Qualtrics, we exported data to Excel to sort, analyze and create charts and tables. These analyses addressed all of our individual research questions and also assisted us in further narrowing our focus for our subsequent individual interviews. This stage of our sequential mixed design was the first of three Inferential Stages (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), because we drew conclusions from the first set of data, QUANT, to influence the conceptual stage of our QUAL study. See Figure 3 at the conclusion of this methods section for a graphic display of our design.

When we conducted our first inferential stage, we were interested in patterns between survey items. We noted patterns in the categories of students reported by superintendents as most likely to enroll in charter schools and the degree of impact reported by superintendents. We noted patterns in the reasons superintendents reported parents were choosing to seek charter school enrollment and the types of actions superintendents reported to undertake at least partly in response to charter school competition. We looked for patterns in responses between districts in the urban superintendents' networks and those not classified as urban, as well as in responses from superintendents representing varying sizes of districts and reporting varying charter school enrollment. As we analyzed data and sort and filter survey responses, themes emerged that influenced refinement of the QUAL component of our study that is described below.

As we moved into the second phase of sequential mixed design, we selected participants for inclusion in the QUAL phase. We used the survey as a vehicle to select our QUAL sample; through one of the survey items, superintendents were asked to volunteer for further participation in the study through participation in semi-structured interviews. This will be discussed in more detail in the description of our interview design.

Selection of Sample for QUAL phase. In the subsequent QUAL phase of our MM design, we conducted in-depth structured interviews with nine (9) Superintendents in districts in which students are eligible to attend one or more charter schools. We sought volunteers through our survey, which provided us with a group of willing participants who were practicing superintendents with a charter school option available for the students in their districts. While a larger sample size might have yielded greater opportunities to generate generalizable results, the size of our research team (three researchers) and our timeline required us to limit our interviews to a manageable amount. We were cognizant of the fact that we had only two months to collect our data. As a group with only three members we needed to assess our limitations while

ensuring that we created a large enough sample that would allow us to point to meaningful findings. Hill, Thompson & Williams (1997), “recommend including at least 8 to 15 participants to have a large enough sample so that researchers can determine whether findings apply to several people or are just representative of one or two people” (p. 532). Because our interviews followed the collection of QUANT data through the survey, and we determined that 61 survey responses provided meaningful data, our reliance on the interviews to produce a meaningful sample size was reduced.

We received 21 volunteers to participate in an interview for our study, although some who indicated interest did not accept the invitation to be interviewed. To select nine volunteers we utilized demographic data from the survey to select representatives from multiple regions (identified in the survey through the geographic superintendents’ round tables). Because of a limited survey response (5) from districts designated as “urban” we sought to prioritize interviews with superintendents representing districts in the urban superintendent’s network to add depth to our data from districts in that category. Through this method and following up with superintendents who expressed an interest in participating in interviews, we found seven superintendents for our interviews; we found that two geographic regions in particular yielded a higher volume of volunteers and yet two geographic regions were not represented. We also found that we had a higher volume of volunteers from districts that were not categorized as urban. We utilized our professional networks to invite two additional superintendents (our 8th and 9th) to participate; to focus our outreach we prioritized locating superintendents representing urban districts located in the remaining two geographic regions.

Semi-structured Interview Design. When considering which type of interview to conduct, Creswell (2012) encourages researchers to “choose the one that will allow you to best learn the participants’ views and answer each research question” (p. 221). We conducted semi-

structured in-person interviews following the protocol established by Creswell (2012), Johnson & Christensen (2008), and Miles & Huberman (1994). We developed a semi-structured interview protocol that was designed to align with the prompts in our survey that was conducted in the QUANT sequence of our MM study. We aligned questions with our overarching research questions and individual sub-questions. As noted above, following a review of our QUANT phase, we revised and refined the questions in our interview protocol.

We designed an interview protocol that included a series of questions and potential probes. To ensure consistency in our interview execution and to support our collective analysis of QUAL data, we conducted interviews in teams. All three members of the research team participated in the initial interview; subsequent interviews were conducted in pairs. We determined to conduct interviews in pairs to ensure that we created consistent interview conditions across three researchers.

The questions in our interview protocol were designed to deepen our understanding about our phenomena by providing greater detail and context that explains superintendent perceptions about charter school competition and its impact on district decision-making. We developed three clusters of questions and probes in our interview questions. We designed the first cluster of questions to explore the perceptions, attitudes, opinions and beliefs of superintendents about charter schools in general, and the ways or degree to which charter school competition exists. While the QUANT tool (the survey) already asked superintendents to rate their perception of the impact of charter schools on their districts, our interviews asked participants to describe impacts, provide examples, and narrate experiences over time.

We designed the second cluster of questions on the interview protocol to provide the context and details about the nature of the competitive pressure created by charter schools. Questions in this cluster asked participants how their districts are impacted by charter school

competition, the types of students most or least likely to leave a district to enroll in charter schools, the reasons parents choose charter schools, and how the superintendent perceives the public perception of charter schools in his/her community. There were parallel questions in the QUANT tool, which provided ratings scales and perceptions of many (61) superintendents, while our QUAL exploration provided us with context, detail, and explanation.

We designed the third cluster in the interview protocol to explore the superintendents' perceptions of the districts' responses to charter school competition. This cluster provided an opportunity for superintendents to describe innovations or reforms they have undertaken and to describe if those have been in response to charter school competition or other reasons/influences. In this section we also asked superintendents to describe actions unrelated to instructional service delivery – such as anti-charter school advocacy, marketing of district programs, parent outreach, or organizational changes. We designed corresponding questions related to these themes in the survey, which provided QUANT data that reflect superintendents' self-reported actions; the interview questions in this cluster allowed us to identify if there have been innovations or reform efforts in the participants' districts that are not perceived to be related to charter school competition as well as provided context and details about when actions are taken that are in response to charter schools. Prior to executing our interviews, we pilot tested our protocols as described below.

Pilot Test of Interview Questions. The pilot testing of interview questions assisted us in determining if there were flaws or other weaknesses in the interview questions and in the overall interview process, allowing us to make revisions prior to the implementation of the study (Kvale, 2007). We piloted our interview questions with three superintendents during the month of October 2013 to assess the wording and neutrality of questions, their flow and logical consistency, and our ability to communicate questions in a clear, audible, and consistent manner.

We sought feedback from our pilot participants and revised our original interview protocol based on their feedback as well as based on our experience with the protocol. We revised the wording, added probes, and removed or added entire questions based on our pilot test.

Conducting Interviews. We conducted nine in-person interviews. With participant consent, we used electronic devices to audio record each interview using Notability.

While our tool was designed with open-ended questions, we also used a set of follow up probes that we consistently employed as needed to deepen our dialogue with participants. We used probes “to clarify points or to have the interviewee expand on ideas. These probes varied from “exploring the content in more depth (elaborating) to asking the interviewee to explain the answer in more detail (clarifying)” (Creswell, 2012, p. 221). While we had a protocol, we also followed the lead of our participants as they responded to open-ended questions to ensure that they had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say about our topic and to avoid leading responses in a particular direction. We found that in many interviews, participants produced long responses to our initial open-ended questions that included points and statements that addressed multiple interview items.

Given our work with many districts, there were volunteers for interviews who had acquaintances or professional connections with members of our research team. When possible, we ensured that other team members conducted interviews with participants with whom one of us had a personal or professional connection, particularly when we identified that the connection may influence or hinder the responses from the participant. One of our researchers is the principal of a charter school; when a superintendent from that region was interviewed we purposefully did not include that research team member in the interview, but did disclose to the participant that this individual was part of our research team. Another member of our team is the executive director of an education service agency that is governed by a board of directors

comprised of superintendents. One of the participant volunteers is a member of that board of directors; in this case, the scheduling and geography logistics required the participant with the professional connection to be a part of the interview pair as the other option would have been to have only one research team member conduct the interview alone. We decided that having a pair was more important to the integrity of the data collection, so the executive director did join the interview, but participated more as an observer and the other team member took the lead in this interview. In another case, a participant was the superintendent of the district in which one research member resides and to which that member's children attend. Again, we determined that having a pair present for the interview was most important and that the connection to the district did not prevent the superintendent from responding thoroughly and openly to the interview questions.

We followed the ethical guidelines put forth by Creswell, with a particular focus on how the interviewees answered the open-ended questions. Considering the potential political nature of our conversations regarding the impact of charter schools on districts, we kept in mind the advice of Creswell (2012), "participants give a great deal when they choose to participate in qualitative research topics....Participants may disclose sensitive and potentially distressing information in the course of the interview" (p. 232). We provided our participants assurance of our commitment to maintain strict confidentiality of the interviewees.

Transcription and Coding of Interview Data. All interviews were transcribed and then coded using Dedoose web-based software. We developed a set of codes to use in both the QUANT and QUAL portions of our study. Codes were initially designed as a start list, or a priori list, so that we could begin to categorize data from the very beginning and as a way to organize and design our data collection tools. As we implemented our study, codes were revised

through each inferential stage to ensure that we had categories to capture unanticipated themes, trends, and findings. See the domain map in Appendix C for our codes.

Analysis of Interview Data. We used Dedoose web-based software to store, sort, organize, and analyze our QUAL data, and to assist us in developing themes, findings and conclusions. This was the second inferential stage of our sequential mixed study. As in the QUANT inferential phase, these analyses addressed all of our individual research questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). See Figure 3 at the conclusion of this methods section for a graphic display of our design.

As we conducted our QUAL inferential stage, we were interested in patterns or themes that emerged between interviews, participants, and across interview questions. The three clusters of interview questions were designed to correlate with specific research questions and align with survey questions as well. As in our QUAN inferential stage, we looked for themes and connections between items. For example, we looked for connections between the number and type of students leaving the district and the level of competitive pressure reported by the superintendent; for connections between the reasons superintendents believe parents are likely to seek charter enrollment and the types of initiatives they undertake in the district for connections between the types of students leaving and the types of initiatives undertaken; for connections between the type or niche of a particular charter school, and the superintendent's perception of that charter school.

Conduct Meta-Inference of Combined QUAN and QUAL Data. After we concluded our analysis of the interview data, we embarked on our third and final inferential stage, which brought the QUAN and QUAL analysis together through meta-inference (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). This was an opportunity to compare our findings and themes, identify if the results from the QUAL phase supported or explained the results in the QUAN stage, or if there were

divergent findings. We triangulated findings where results in both stages confirmed or correlated with each other, and identified differences in findings where they occurred (Figure 3-2).

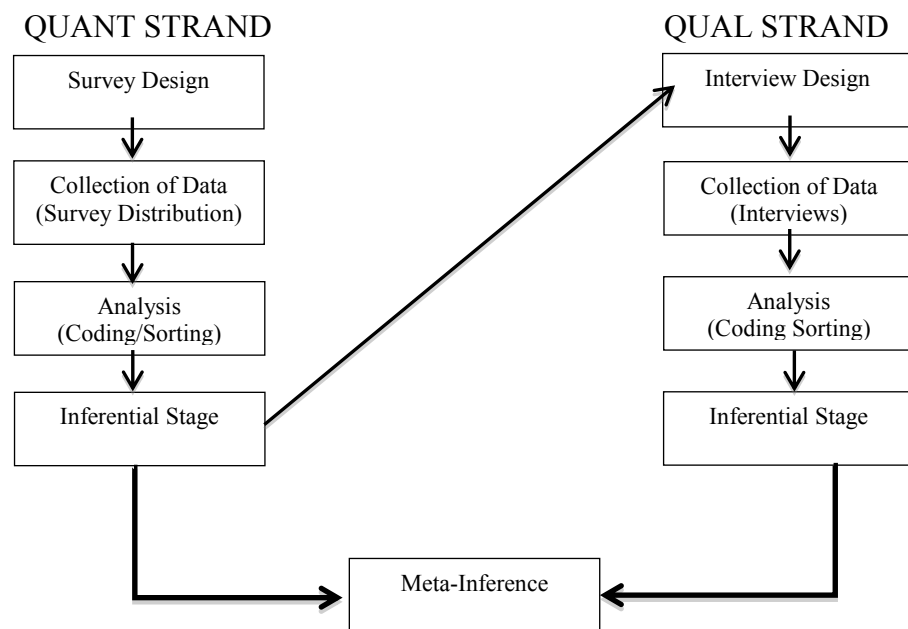


Figure 3-2.

Graphic Presentation of Sequential Mixed Design (adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006)

Quantitative Sample (Tables 3-1 to 3-3)

SURVEY: 69 responses – 61 with a charter school option

Sample size (n) = 61

5 out of 51 = Urban (defined by assigned to Urban Superintendents' Network

Table 3-1

Survey Respondents by Geographic Round Tables

| Geographic Region | N | % |
|--------------------|----|-----|
| Berkshire County | 2 | 3% |
| Connecticut Valley | 9 | 15% |
| North Shore | 5 | 8% |
| Old Colony | 7 | 12% |
| South Shore | 9 | 15% |
| TriCounty | 8 | 13% |
| Worcester County | 16 | 27% |
| Merrimack Valley | 4 | 7% |

Note: Response total = 61

Table 3-2

Survey Respondents Student Enrollment

| <u>Enrollment of District</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|
| less than 1,500 students | 8 | 13% |
| 1,500-2,500 students | 15 | 25% |
| 2,501-4,000 students | 22 | 36% |
| 4,001-6,000 students | 12 | 20% |
| 6,001-10,000 students | 3 | 5% |
| More than 10,000 students | 1 | 2% |

Note: Response total = 61

Table 3-3

Survey Respondents by Charter School Enrollment

| <u>% of Students in Charter School</u> | <u>Response</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--|-----------------|----------|
| Less than 1% | 22 | 36% |
| 1% to 2% | 17 | 28% |
| 3% to 4% | 12 | 20% |
| 5% to 6% | 5 | 8% |
| 7% to 8% | 1 | 2% |
| 9% or more | 4 | 7% |

Note: Response total = 61

Qualitative Sample (Tables 3-4 to 3-6)

38 superintendents provided qualitative data

9 superintendents provided written responses to survey and participated in interviews

29 superintendents provided written responses to open-ended sections of the survey (62% of survey respondents)

Table 3-4

Interview Participants by Geographic Round Tables

| <u>Geographic Region</u> | <u>N</u> |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Berkshire County | 1 |
| Connecticut Valley | 0 |
| North Shore | 1 |
| Old Colony | 1 |
| South Shore | 1 |
| TriCounty | 2 |
| Worcester County | 2 |
| Merrimack Valley | 1 |

Note: Total = 9

Table 3-5

Interview Participants by Student Enrollment

| <u>Enrollment of District</u> | <u>N</u> | <u># in Urban Network</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| less than 1,500 students | 0 | 0 |
| 1,500-2,500 students | 2 | 0 |
| 2,501-4,000 students | 2 | 0 |
| 4,001-6,000 students | 2 | 2 |
| 6,001-10,000 students | 3 | 2 |
| More than 10,000 students | 0 | 0 |

Note: Total = 9; Total in Urban Network = 4

Table 3-6

Interview Participants by Charter School Enrollment

| <u>% Enrolled in Charter(s)</u> | <u>N</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Less than 1% | 3 |
| 1% to 2% | 2 |
| 3% to 4% | 2 |
| 5% to 6% | 0 |
| 7% to 8% | 1 |
| 9% or more | 1 |

Note: Total = 9

Chapter 4: Examples of Innovations in Traditional Public Schools that are Influenced by Competition from Charter Schools

Statement of the Problem

The history of the Massachusetts Educational Reform Act of 1993 indicates that one of the primary reasons for the creation of charter schools in the Commonwealth was to spur innovations in traditional public schools. Market pressures would force the traditional public school to observe how the charter schools were implementing innovation and reform accordingly so as not to lose potential consumers, i.e. students or parents. Charter schools would serve as laboratories of innovation that could be emulated by the traditional public school in the district (Bulkley, 2004; Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; Toma & Zimmer, 2012). Twenty years on, the question remains as to whether creating a competitive atmosphere in school districts in order to spur innovation practices in traditional public schools is actually coming to fruition.

In Ricciardelli, (2014), my colleague investigated the perceptions of superintendents about the educational marketplace. Her study illuminated how superintendents viewed the funding formula as inherently unfair and how the intent of the 1993 legislation was falling short in terms of promoting the fundamental democratic ideals of public education in Massachusetts. In Cummins (2014), my other colleague focused primarily on the types of students superintendents in the Commonwealth perceive to be enrolling in charter schools. Her study investigated whether high performing students leaving to attend charter schools are placing increased competitive pressure on traditional public schools. Building on the work of Ricciardelli, (2014) and Cummins (2014), this chapter will focus specifically on whether the perceptions of superintendents play a role in the creation, development and promotion of innovations in their respective districts.

Research Question

My overarching research question asked, *How does a superintendent's perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation?* My research problem specifically sought to investigate, now that charter schools have been in existence for more than two decades, the following question: *Does competition from charter schools spur innovation in traditional public districts?* There is little in the literature that delineates the specific innovations being implemented across the Commonwealth as a result of market-based competition, either from charters or school choice. My research is intended to contribute to this literature.

Individual Inquiry Question

My individual focus centers on the following question: *What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?* I have illuminated a number of specific examples of administrative and instructional innovations in traditional public schools that were influenced by charter school competition. Specific inquiry questions include the following:

- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve marketing?
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve capital improvements or enhancements to infrastructure?
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve hours of operation and/or working conditions for staff?
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve professional development?

- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve specialized programs and curriculum.
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve student assessments?
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve pedagogical practices?
- What are some examples of innovations that superintendents have implemented that involve professional collaboration?

Literature Review

A full literature review can be found in Chapter 2 of this study. Unique to this chapter, I wish to provide even more background on what the literature has to say about the relationship between charter schools and innovation in district schools. Prominent educational figures from across the political spectrum initially seemed to embrace the concept that charter schools could serve as laboratories of innovation. (Finn, Manno, Vanourek, 2000, p. 167). By providing an alternative, traditional public schools could observe what was possible when the bureaucratic hurdles were removed and innovation was allowed to flourish in an autonomous educational setting (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Lubienski, 2003; Finnigan, 2007; RPP, 2001). In theory, the district would have no alternative but to innovate in order to survive.

Within the first ten years, charter schools across the country were being recognized for their implementation of innovative practices. A 2004 report from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement entitled, *Successful Charter Schools*, explained how the freedom to innovate in the charters observed for the study helped to drive the culture of the school.

In effective charter schools, the mission drives every aspect of the school program, and in each case the school program reflects the school's freedom to experiment, to be creative in terms of organization, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction...The schools are infused with the spirit of innovation. In one charter school, innovation takes the form of a longer school day; at another, it is the teaching pedagogy or scheduling configuration. What such practices have been developed and tried in other places across the country, the novel ways charter schools can put them together often results in a school culture and operational structure quite different from those in neighboring schools (p. 7).

Defining Innovation

Educational researchers have identified that charter schools have attempted innovations that impact administration and instruction (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Ellison, 2009; Lubienski, 2003; Welch, 2010). In order to reduce confusion over the complexities surrounding defining and describing the word innovation, this study will adhere to one definition. Using the model established by Ellison (2009), I divide innovations into two groups: those that have a more administrative focus, meaning that they target areas which do not have a direct impact on classroom instruction, and those that fall under instruction, indicating that they directly impact teaching and learning. As mentioned in the review of the literature,

Administrative innovation denotes experimentation with and transformation of school organizational models and administrative functions, labor policies and incentive structures, and professional development and training. Instructional innovation denotes experimentation with and the transformation of pedagogical practices, curricular approaches, student assessments and professional collaboration (Ellison, 2009, p. 31).

Although there may be areas of overlap between administrative and instructional innovation, primarily in the area of professional development and training, each will be investigated in an attempt to promote a more thorough analysis.

The Debate over Innovation

As the proliferation of charters has grown across the United States, researchers sought to analyze the true impact of innovations. Rather than finding that the innovations launched by charters were truly unique, some authors reported that, “much of what we have found in charter schools is also done in some conventional schools. Many charter schools draw upon practices proven over decades of research and experience. Their innovation may lie in their rejection of fads and their embrace of the tried-and-true” (Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000, p. 91). Critics responded that the innovations initiated by charters were no different than the administrative and educational initiatives offered in the traditional public school and that, as privatization and a focus on test scores took over the charter model, there was less incentive for the charter schools to collaborate and disseminate best practices with the traditional public school (Ravitch, 2010). There are other scholars who believe that the initial concept behind charter schools, that they would prompt district schools to innovate, has come to fruition, especially in Massachusetts.

Innovations in Response to Charters

Charles S. Clark, (2002) in his article looking at the impact of Charter Schools, referenced the 2001 RPP International report entitled, *Challenge and Opportunity: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts*. RPP International, an educational research agency, was formally known as Berman Weiler Associates. Clark relates the findings in one school district where, “As a result of competition from the charter schools, the superintendent implemented several new educational programs, remodeled school buildings, included parents in the hiring process for new principals, encouraged team teaching and directed elementary schools to divide

themselves into smaller units, or ‘families,’ to increase the sense of community” (Clark, 2002, p. 102). In Massachusetts, some proponents of charter schools believe that innovations have been disseminated to the traditional public schools. In 2009, the MA DESE produced the *Best Practices and Dissemination Guide*. It states:

When charter schools became part of the public education landscape with the passage of the 1993 Education Reform Act, they were charged with studying, documenting, and disseminating their best practices to public schools throughout the Commonwealth. Many charter schools have shared their innovative solutions to meeting the needs of all types of student learners, partnering with public school districts, individual schools within districts, and other charter schools to share key design elements of their academic programs as well as organizational, governance, and management practices (p. 5).

Although the above claims may be substantiated to some degree, I sought to investigate whether the promise of charter schools as indicated in the legislation has been realized. Have charter schools become laboratories of innovation that would be replicated by the traditional public school in the district in which the charter was situated?

Methods

See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of the methods employed during our study. Unique to this chapter, I analyzed quantitative data generated from our survey of Massachusetts superintendents. Question Number 12 in the survey related directly to the presence of innovations in district schools. I asked superintendents which initiatives their districts had undertaken because of the presence of a charter school. The options provided in the survey included: New curriculum and instruction initiatives; Modifications to school hours of operation; Launching of marketing materials or strategic communication; Modifications to work conditions for staff; Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure; Design of specialized programs;

Change in pace or level of priority for initiatives we planned to do anyway; None and Other, with an option to specify. (Table 4c-1 in the results section below). The latter option asked the superintendent to provide information about the initiative undertaken as a response to the presence of charter schools.

Open response survey items and interview transcriptions were coded. Analysis of data coded in the following categories: Working Conditions (school day/year) combined with Extended Learning Time; Infrastructure combined with Facilities; Marketing and Promotion combined with Communication; Professional Development; Specialized Program combined with Curriculum; Student Assessments; Pedagogical practices; Student Assessments; and Technology and Professional Collaboration. Although not an innovation, Policy Advocacy was also included for analysis.

Results

The headings that will highlight Administrative Innovations will be listed as follows: Communication; Marketing & Promotion; Design, production and dissemination of materials; Hiring of a PR consultant and/or launching campaigns; Capital Improvements & Infrastructure; Building of Brand New Facilities; Renovation of Facilities; Investment in Technology; Modifications to Hours of Operation and/or Working Conditions for Staff; Staff Management' Unions and Extended Learning Time; Professional Development; School Culture; Professional Development Alternative Programs; and Professional Development Administration. The headings that will identify Instructional Innovations will be listed as follows: Specialized Programs and Curriculum; Programs Serving High Achievers; Language Programs; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs; Students Assessments; Technology; Pedagogical Practice; and Professional Collaboration.

Administrative Innovations

Communication, Marketing & Promotion

In question 12 of the survey, superintendents were asked to *select initiatives that they undertook because of the presence of a charter school option*. Superintendents could select more than one initiative. Out of the 56 superintendent respondents who answered this specific question, 23 indicated that no initiatives were undertaken. Out of the 33 superintendents who indicated that they were, in fact, launching an initiative (see Table 4c 1), 27 respondents, or 81%, reported to be launching marketing materials or strategic communications about district programs at least in part in response to the presence of charter schools. Of the 27 superintendents who selected the Launching of Marketing Materials or Strategic Communication, 21 selected another initiative as well. As seen from the table, this specific innovation was, by far, the most frequent innovation taking place across the Commonwealth in response to marketplace pressure. Although Marketing and Promotion and Communication were initially separated, the results from the survey indicate that these individual codes should be seen together.

Table 4a 1 Superintendents responses to survey question regarding initiatives.
 Survey question: *“Please select initiatives your district has undertaken that are, in part, influenced by the presence of a charter school option for your students. Please select all that apply.*

| Initiative | Response | % |
|--|----------|-----|
| New Curriculum & Instruction | 12 | 21% |
| Modifications to School Hours of Operation | 3 | 5% |
| Marketing/Communication | 27 | 48% |
| Modifications to Work Conditions for Staff | 2 | 4% |
| Capital Improvements | 12 | 21% |
| Design of Specialized Programs | 15 | 27% |
| Change in Pace/Priority for Existing Initiatives | 6 | 11% |
| None | 23 | 41% |
| Other | 6 | 11% |

The survey asked superintendents to provide a written response about launched initiatives. The specific question asked was: *“In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiative that you think would be helpful for our study”*. The qualitative data gathered provided examples of marketing and strategic communications that superintendents have implemented in their districts as a response to charter schools. Distinct themes emerged, especially a focus on the extent to which marketing and strategic communication was manifesting itself in districts with a charter school. (Table 4c 2) In order to assist my analysis, I took each response and placed it into a specific category. The first category was designated **Parent/Community Outreach** as a way to group responses in which the superintendent took it upon him/herself to reach out to parents and/or the larger community to market the district. The second category, designated **Materials**, sought to group responses

around the production and dissemination of marketing materials that highlighted the district. The final category, called **Public Relations**, grouped responses around efforts by superintendents to either hire a Public Relations (PR) person and/or launch a specific PR campaign. Their responses below are taken verbatim from the responses of the superintendents to survey Question 12.

Table 4a 2: Survey responses that included description of marketing and communication activities.

“In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiative that you think would be helpful for our study”.

| Parent/Community Outreach | Materials | Public Relations |
|--|--|--|
| Guidance Department invites parents to informational meetings | Flyers have been sent to the community about our positive schools and MCAS results/ranking within the Commonwealth. | New PR position |
| “Our high school has developed a series of parent nights to offer information to parents considering a placement other than [the local district] High School (charter, private)” | Brochures, newspaper ads, open house events. | We are launching a major PR campaign for the system as a whole, not only to address exodus to charter schools, but also to vocational schools. |
| We now go into the MS and grade 5 of elementary to talk to our upper grades. | Expensive creation of marketing plans (radio, video, newspaper ads, attendance at fairs) taking valuable dollars away from SpEd and low income children. | Promoting specialized programs such as improved voc./tech offerings expanded AP courses |
| More with parent advisory council | Lots of marketing. | |
| Promote the # of AP classes at our high school | More with website | |
| Have a new parent charter school outreach group. | We have tried to do a better job of sharing our successes. | |
| Communication about our advanced math program. | | |

In an open response section of the survey, marketing was also mentioned by one respondent. Question 3 asked superintendents to provide additional information or examples for any of the areas in which they reported a "moderate" or "major" impact of charter schools on their districts. One took the opportunity to mention specific marketing to combat the presence of charters in the district:

Not just due to charter schools, but with their impact and the overall impact of a declining student population we have closed two schools in 8 years. Annually, we are losing over 2 million dollars to charter schools. The students leaving are typically already proficient and advanced as measured by MCAS. We have had to spend additional money on marketing our district-print ads, radio, etc. to maintain the district's credibility.

In interviews with nine superintendents across Massachusetts, the qualitative data suggests that superintendents are discussing the launching of marketing materials and/or strategic communications about district programs within a similar framework. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, six specifically mentioned marketing and/or strategic communication when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools.

When discussing the personal involvement of a superintendent and/or school personnel in marketing and/or strategic communication via community outreach, a number of interviewees explained that they saw it as their responsibility to connect with the community at large in order to market and promote the successes of their districts' students. They felt that if they could connect with parents on a personal level, they could demonstrate commitment in the face of charter school competition. Frank, a superintendent from an urban district, said that he faces considerable pressure from charter schools. He had just returned from a lecture at Harvard by Diane Ravitch, and he informed us that one take-away from her lecture was for school leaders to

reach out to different segments of the community, such as the press and real estate brokers.

Frank explained his promotion of his district in the context of buying a home. He had an open house for realtors in the area, with a spread of cookies, coffee and donuts. Frank also invited the editor from the local newspaper and invited her to tour the school and stop anyone in the halls and ask them questions. Although he was pleased that the editor "...wrote a phenomenal editorial about Paulburg High School," he added, "Look how hard I had to work. And when I look at some of my fellow superintendents, I mean, I am not saying that they don't work hard -- they do. But they do not have to fight perception."

William, another urban superintendent, explained that he has to reach out to the press to promote his school and to sell the positive aspects of the district. The marketing strategy appears to be making a difference in how the community views the district. Like Frank, William works to build relationships beyond the walls of the school building. In the interview, William said that "a lot of that comes around the ways I push our leaders to become innovative. Not only innovative but to become a leader beyond our school, like pushing myself to work for the superintendents association to work through the chairs and got to be the president, there's a certain pride that was placed in the district when the superintendent has that role. I pushed that with everybody." William also encourages the local paper to publish the test scores and he even writes short pieces for the opinion section of his local paper, "...usually positive telling about the good work our teachers are doing and statistically what the scores are looking like." He feels that by publishing the scores and helping frame the conversation with his articles, he is helping to dictate the conversation. He has seen results in the way his town perceives the school system. William believes that "by helping the community understand what the schools do, we help create a critical mass that only helps things to stay better - to stay stronger which keeps the brain trust in and even helps to stifle some of the trickle out to charter schools. And then, when some

charter school comes knocking at the door, we've got everyone in the community now – real estate people even, who say, there's just no place for you and I don't think we need you.”

William, like Frank, sees it as his responsibility to be not just the school leader but also the one who must battle against the common perception that charter schools offer a better alternative than district schools.

A main focus for William was to maintain what he calls “the brain trust,” those students with solid MCAS scores who might be looking for an alternative. He saw it as imperative to market as a way to stop the departure of high achieving students from his schools.

My sole objective at that time as a district administrator and I think one of the reasons they hired me was to help them reverse the trend of exodus of students. So that marketing piece and my first strategy was to retain the brain trust. In a matter of three to four years, we had done that...I have an advantage because the community knew my name and they knew what we did with the kids from Northtown over time, so there was a marketing strategy too.

Jonathan, a superintendent from a suburban/rural district, also believes that marketing is key. He elaborated on how he has to work extra hours to keep local kids in his schools in the face of competition in the educational marketplace. Although he was hesitant to use the word “market,” he did say that, “I work very hard to manage the public perception of this school district. To make sure that [a parent knows] that [she has] a quality school district, knows that her kids are getting a great education, and is aware of some of the uniqueness about Hillbury that instills a community pride in its schools.” Jonathan explained that he wants the achievements of his schools to be the talk of the town.

As he spoke, he began to warm to the concept that, as a superintendent in this competitive marketplace, he was charged with marketing his product. Jonathan said that, “my job –

marketing – and again, I don’t object to the use of the word because I market budgets all the time, but I consider it to be managing the public perception of the school district. It is a very important job of the superintendent in my view, particularly in a community like this who is spending a lot of their treasure on our schools.” Managing the public’s perception about their choices was a refrain we heard from other superintendents as well. Even if some were not taking on the role of superintendents as primary marketers, some mentioned that they were allocating resources to sell their brand in a different way.

Design, production and dissemination of materials

The design, production and dissemination of materials were also a recurring theme. Eric, a superintendent from a more rural community that has a high reliance on tourism, explained that he faces competition on a number of fronts: from charter schools, Catholic schools, and also inter-district school choice. Although his district is seen as one of the best in the area he said that, “we can’t rest on our laurels; we need to do our best in order to attract and hold families.” For Eric, the fact that students have the school choice option has led him to make specific marketing decisions. In the face of market competition, Eric decided last year would be the first time that he openly advertised his school district.

All of the districts around us did and maybe being the new guy....there was talk about not doing that....and I just said, look...I know I need to get my head in the game and we need to be competitive. So, yes, we will be advertising. Last year was our first year doing that...If you don’t plan on taking in and you’re only paying out- you come out the loser. So that’s why we are now going to advertising as well and we are coming out ahead of the game.

As demonstrated in this last comment, Eric is cognizant of the different marketing approaches by his competitors. Eric also faces stiff competition from the local charter school, called Regis

Charter, and he keeps that in mind when promoting his district. Rather than go negative against Regis, Eric said that, “we really focus on the quality of education that we offer, which may sound like a rather obvious response, but what I seek to do is capitalize on the assets that I see within the system and obviously, in this case where it’s about charter schools and our greatest impact with Regis. We really do focus in on the assets that we have to offer.” Some school districts recognize that they can’t simply rely on a cult of personality or attractive advertisements in the local papers. Some superintendents have needed to hire a PR consultant to ensure that students don’t choose the local charter school.

Hiring of a PR consultant and/or launching campaigns

Some superintendents have decided to launch PR campaigns. Although he did not feel that he needed to hire a specific PR consultant, Jonathan, a suburban superintendent, recognized the need to take the marketing of his district one step further by launching a specific PR initiative. He informed us that, “I’m about to start a marketing campaign literally because I want Hillbury to have mandatory full-day kindergarten as part of its budget and one of my marketing tools is that Covington is doing the same thing.... And that’s part of again the pride of the school district.” Other districts keep tabs on the marketing campaigns of the local charter as expressed by a singular superintendent in the open response from the survey. “The charter also has better/more focused PR team than any public around--including us--and uses this to great success.” In response, some have even gone so far as to hire a consultant to run a PR campaign. According to Frank, he is aware that it will cost him resources to have a person whose sole responsibility is public relations, but he recognizes that he must sell his district as a brand in a similar manner to a business person fighting for market share. He explains,

Yes. I just hired a PR person, which I call a 'Family and Community Champion.' That’s the job title. And she is a part-time. She works hourly. And basically, it’s been like a blessing, because I used to do all of these by myself...She goes to a lot of events; it is like

Saturday, she was at the mall, we had a table at the mall. There was an event there. You know, I've had a tablecloth made like the banks used...So, our motto was now, 'Focus, Understand and Educate.' So, I am branding that. I had hats made. ...So, really so much is perception.

It is illuminating that Frank talks of his approach as similar to banks that wish potential clients to open an account. Although marketing and strategic communication was identified as primary by the majority of superintendents in our survey, the other administrative innovation implemented by district superintendents in the Commonwealth targets facilities as a way to combat student losses to the charter school.

Marketing can take many forms. Some superintendents were not only targeting parents and business leaders, but were also developing marketing strategies to get students to identify the district as a type of brand. One superintendent saw it as a marketing move to encourage more athletics in the younger grades, so that the student would grow up using the town fields. Frank, an urban superintendent explained how he was using resources to try and reach the smallest consumers.

Three years ago we were finding our sports program at the high school was weak because our kids don't have travel teams and they don't have their parents driving them all over for an AAU team and everything. So they were getting no sports experience. So three years ago I took school choice money and created free middle school sports for all students in all sports including lacrosse...There is some selfishness here. We start branding these kids Demon Deacons at an early age. We don't tattoo it on them, but we gave them T-Shirts...But to try to create some sense of belonging to the Paulberg Public Schools. And I used School choice dollars to do that. ...Because my word to the school

committee is, 'these are school choice dollars. And I have got 300 students school

“choicing-into” Paulberg, but I had three times as many school “choicing-out.”

By purchasing hats and t-shirts for the smallest consumers, the superintendents are trying to have the students identify with their home fields and district school. This feeling was echoed by Gloria, the Wheatfield Superintendent, who also believed that promoting activities for the very young can help the student as consumer develop brand loyalty.

It's about kids and about their activities and they're still involved and they're still playing the Wheatfield fields, and they're so, I think it's an interesting way to approach it that, it's that, you think that home-grown feel keeps them here, rather than trying to find greener pastures elsewhere?

One wonders whether the legislators had this type of marketing in mind when they proposed the creation of charter schools in Massachusetts.

Capital Improvements & Infrastructure

The survey asked superintendents to select initiatives that their districts have undertaken that are, in part, influenced by the presence of a charter school option for their students. In their responses, some superintendents were investing in their facilities. Of the 56 superintendent respondents to our survey who answered this specific question, 23 indicated that there were no initiatives undertaken. Of the other 33 superintendents who indicated that they were, in fact, launching an initiative (see Table 4c 1), 12 respondents or 36%, reported to be addressing *capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure*. Of the 12 superintendents who selected capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure, nine selected another initiative as well. The survey asked superintendents to provide a written response about specific capital improvements to buildings that were undertaken as a result of pressure from charter schools. Distinct themes emerged, especially a focus as to how superintendents were choosing to allocate capital

improvement resources in the face of marketplace pressure from charter schools. (Table 4c 3) In order to assist my analysis, I took each response and placed it in a specific category. The first category was designated as **Building of Brand New Facilities** as a way to group responses in which the superintendent intended to build a completely new structure. The second category, designated as **Renovation of Facilities**, sought to group responses around the renovation of existing structures in the district. The final category, called **Investment in Technology**, grouped responses around efforts by superintendents to upgrade infrastructure to support new technological advances. Their responses below are taken verbatim from the responses of the superintendents to the survey.

Table 4a 3: Survey responses that included description of capital improvements and infrastructure.

“In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiative that you think would be helpful for our study”.

| Building of Brand New Facilities | Renovation of Facilities | Investment in Technology |
|--|--|---|
| New school | Renovated school | Especially technology upgrades |
| Built a new middle/high school | Renovate school facility | Reviewing and revising the STEM education, along with a significant increase in technology capabilities |
| We are trying to build a new HS | Major investment in this area | New focus on STEM |
| While the project would have been pursued regardless, the building of a new middle schools is seen as a plus for retaining students. | Enhanced athletics and theatre performing arts as we have excellent facilities that charter cannot match | Increase technology |

Building of Brand New Facilities

Interviewing the nine superintendents added a greater degree of specificity about how capital improvements were being impacted by marketplace competition. Of the nine

superintendents interviewed, six mentioned capital improvements when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools.

Frank, an urban superintendent, was able to look at his long career as a superintendent and recall how he used innovative capital improvements when he was the school leader in Stableton to distinguish his district from Regis Charter. He had just finished a \$63-million renovation to the high schools in Stableton with a “state-of-the-art performing arts center.” His hope was that these capital improvements would hold close to 3,000 students. At the same time, Regis Charter had just been given permission to renovate an old furniture store on Main Street. Frank could not understand the choices being made by the state.

I was saying, “This is ludicrous.” We have no money, we’re making budget cuts like crazy, the state just funded a state-of-the-art school, and we’re renovating a furniture store to house the same students for whom we just built the state-of-the-art school. And I actually approached Regis and said, “I have an empty wing of this brand new high school. You can have it.” But at that time there was no interest in doing anything of that type because the purpose of creating charter schools was to say “Public school bad, charter school good.” So it was a different time.

Frank explained that he may have been inclined to seek these capital improvements regardless of Regis Charter being in his district, but the fact is that there was a competitive environment. His desire was to expand the performing arts center as a way to keep and attract students.

I think you could ask anybody who’s known me for the last 25 years. I didn’t need charter schools to make me innovative or competitive... I’ve been innovative since the days I was down in Stableton. ...I wanted a performing arts center. I brought together the ballet, the Central Ballet, the symphony. That’s always been a part of who I am. There must be another way to do this. That said, that attitude plays well in this competitive

environment. Because, if you are not moving forward, you are moving backwards...So, that's just who we are and what we are doing. Now, is it a little bit of a prod in the butt, you know, to have competition? Yes. Because I am surrounded by competition.

Even though capital improvements may have been on the docket for the superintendents we interviewed, some were of the opinion that, in an atmosphere of charter school competition, building projects at times found a more receptive audience.

In Simsbury, a suburban community that has been losing students to the charter school, Mark, the superintendent said, “we also built a brand new sixth grade school; it's beautiful.” In the interview with Matthew, a superintendent from an urban setting, he explained that he loses a few students to the local charter, but he believes that the capital improvements to the high school were a way to keep students from looking at other options. We asked whether the building of the new high school, or the prioritizing of the construction of a new high school had to do anything with the competition he faces in school choice. He responded, “Absolutely, absolutely....And it makes sense, here is what is driving the high school construction rising to the forefront and... it has been a project in the works for about 8 years.”

In terms of other administrative innovations, one could argue that building new schools or renovating old ones benefits all students. However my data indicated that towns would often build a new high school or renovate an old one with additional technology, even when the elementary schools were in far worse condition, in order to stem the tide of students leaving to go to the local charter school. In some cases, realtors and news reporters were encouraged to visit the high school as well. When it comes to school marketing, it appears that it is the high school that produces the greatest impact on the perception of consumers. My inclination was corroborated by what I witnessed in the field. As an example, when we met Matthew, he was on the phone with his custodial staff. His two elementary schools have considerable heating

problems, yet the town has given him few resources to ameliorate the poor working environment for the students. In our conversation with him, he explained that the town had, years ago, supported the building of a state of the art high school despite the obvious problems with the buildings that house younger students.

What I observed in Matthew's district may have been an anomaly; however, I learned from some superintendents that the building of a brand new facility may not be acceptable in light of how the competition for students has impacted school budgets. As district schools lose students to charter and choice, there is less incentive for the town to spend taxpayer dollars on a building for students who may not attend the school in the first place.

Renovation of Facilities

For some superintendents, an easier remedy is to renovate an existing building. Frank shared earlier that he has encouraged realtors and the newspaper into his school as a way to market his product. Before he brought potential consumers in, he knew that he had to renovate the appearance of the existing structure if he was going to retain students. He explained that,

My first five years here, this place was in shambles. All of our buildings were falling apart. The wind used to come blowing from here out. I used to have a blanket over this window...It was so cold – the snow was coming in. These are brand new windows. All of our schools have boilers, have roofs that aren't leaking, have toilets that aren't broken. When I came here, we had bathrooms where the toilets had been broken, and a black trash bag had been put with duct tape around it. And doors have been taken off of all the bathrooms because our kids couldn't be trusted inside the bathrooms by themselves. So, I spent the first four or five years just changing the culture. Once you feel like you got a facility you can be proud of, and the kids feel good about it, you can start doing some of the other work and changing perception.

Altering the perceptions of the community about the possibilities available in the district was a theme found in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Some superintendents attempted to alter public perception that the charter could offer more in terms of technology by investing heavily in that area.

Investment in Technology

It is clear that there are instances where investments in technology were made as a calculation by the district superintendent to give the message to the larger community that one did not need to reach out to charters to be on the cutting edge of technology.

Keith, a superintendent in a suburban district, stated that by investing in technology and putting the devices in the hands of the kids, the teachers were forced to keep up. In his town, the override was delayed until the end of the spring, so he had no time to train his teachers in the district's investment in iPads for high school students. Keith shared with us that he was confident that the students would lead the way and it would force the teachers to adapt. More importantly, by giving the students access to this type of technology, parents would see that the district was investing in the most current technology. In his instructions to teachers, Keith "made it very clear...our expectation is that you only use this as a tool. Get the counter going, get the agenda going; figure how to access the curriculum so that when they go home they don't have to carry ten thousand books. This should be their backpack." Superintendents shared with us their expectation that parents would respond as consumers after the district updated technology.

Some superintendents went to the consumers first, before investing community resources in technology. Eric, a superintendent from a rural community, was cognizant of the need to consult the parents in his community before he spent district funds on iPads. As Eric is in heavy competition with the local charter school, his awareness of how parents view his district in

comparison to the surrounding communities led him to make a calculated investment in technology.

We heard from parents that technology was really important; so the first thing I did in the first year that made a lot of news -- we started an iPad initiative. And so we've been doing this each year. When we open up next spring every student in grade seven through twelfth will have an iPad. Every teacher will have them. They've already been trained.

We're doing some amazing things with that iPad initiative.

Reaching out to key stakeholders before launching a technology initiative was a proactive step taken by a number of superintendents. Gloria, a superintendent from a suburban district, invested in 1:1 technological innovations for her middle school students based on feedback she received from her community. She informed us that "we did a survey last spring, on a number of things, because that's the long range plan I referenced...another initiative we did was the one-to-one with iPads in our middle school." Investments for capital improvements and technology may have occurred without the presence of charter schools and the threat of school choice, but the fact that superintendents are building and/or renovating facilities, viewing the parents as consumers, and testing out educational investments as if the schools were products to be tested gives a strong indication that the competitive atmosphere unleashed by the 1993 Education Reform Act is having a direct impact on how superintendents view their responsibilities.

Modifications to Hours of Operation and/or Working Conditions for Staff

Another administrative innovation is modification to hours of operation and/or working conditions for staff. In question 12 of the survey, superintendents were asked to *select initiatives that they undertook because of the presence of a charter school option*. The data from the survey revealed specific examples launched by superintendents that altered the hours of operation and/or working conditions of the school as a result of charter schools. Of the 33 superintendents who

indicated that they were launching an initiative (see Table 4c 1), three respondents, .09%, reported they modified school hours of operation *at least in part in response to the presence of charter schools*. All three superintendents who selected modifying the school hours of operation selected another initiative as well. Two respondents, .06%, said that they were making modifications to work conditions for staff. These two superintendents also chose another initiative.

In question 12, superintendents when given to opportunity to write about specific innovations related to modifying the hours of operation of the school. Although these modifications to the hours of operation have an impact on the instructional innovation of extended time, they also have an impact on the working conditions for staff. Respondents reported that they have instituted an “extended day,” a longer school day,” “extended day and extended year opportunities,” “flexible scheduling for staff for extended day and extended year opportunities” and “less traditional union positioning.” In interviews with nine superintendents across Massachusetts, the qualitative data suggests that only a few superintendents are discussing modification of school hours. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, two mentioned this administrative innovation.

Staff Management, Unions and Extended Learning Time

The fact that some charter schools were offering modified hours of operation was on the mind of some superintendents. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, two specifically mentioned modifications to the school day/year when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools. Matthew, an urban superintendent, stated that he knew that Mountain Charter School, the charter school in his district to which he was losing a small percentage of students to each year, was differentiating itself from district schools by expanding learning time for its students. He said that, “I would be more hard pressed

to find and delineate what separates Mountain Charter School from what we do. From my point of view as management – they have a longer school day and there are things they can do because they don't have teachers unions.” Gloria believed that the charters that alter the working conditions do not give other schools an example of innovation that can be replicated but rather create a chasm between teachers who work in charters and their contemporaries in the traditional public school.

My other concern quite honestly is about the folks that work in them. Because I can see that you come together and I'm generalizing, with a great deal of passion and focus and willingness to roll up your sleeves, and do things in a very different way. How long can you sustain that? And so, my understanding is, that there's a great deal of turnover in the typical Charter schools, and I suspect that is part of the reason. That you just can't sustain that, it is something that people in my position have to do, work 60 hours a week, and you know, to be out there no matter what, but I think for young people, or mid-career people, the opportunity costs are tremendous.

There is evidence, however, that superintendents have chosen to alter their school day and calendar as a way to provide an innovation around time in learning. In answering question 12 of the survey, superintendents could select more than one initiative. Of the 33 superintendents who indicated that they were launching an initiative, three respondents indicated that they had made modifications to school hours of operation and two superintendents reported that they had made modifications of work conditions for staff at least in part in response to the presence of charter schools. In our interviews, two of nine superintendents indicated that they are implementing expanded learning opportunities. One specific way that William, a suburban superintendent, competed with charters was by creating an innovation school within his district. He related to us that charters were hurting “his bottom line.” William explained that while he

initially developed a strong working relationship with his administrative team, he recognized that introducing an innovation school in his district might be a tough sell in some of the district buildings. He told his team:

There's this thing coming out of the state called innovation schools and I think we want to be the first innovation school. I need one of you principals to buy into this with me. We want to go down a road to put an innovation school in and you know why. They say "Yeah, you probably want to build up the district more so that no charter wants to come in and set up a tent here." Bingo! Exactly, it's self-preservation. And we have to do that. And we did. We built an innovation school and we did the same with three expanded-learning-time schools. So my goal was to offer enough choice because that is the avant garde, sexy thing about charter schools: "We offer Choice! We offer Choice!" I don't really believe they offer much of a choice. But let me offer my choices. I have eleven schools – three of them are ELT (expanded learning time) and one of them is an innovation school.

While some superintendents are responding to the presence of charters in their districts with innovations that directly impact the working and learning hours of the school day, some have also added administrative innovations that target professional development.

Professional Development

The survey did not ask superintendents specifically about innovations surrounding professional development. In the open response section of the survey, nothing was specifically mentioned that addressed this particular administrative innovation. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, five specifically mentioned professional development when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools.

Professional Development: School Culture

Matthew, an urban superintendent, indicated that some of the professional development was helping his staff take a more proactive approach to bullying prevention. This administrative innovation was in direct response to the reputation of Mountain Charter School, the charter in Matthew's district that is well known for its bullying prevention programs. He stated in school committee meetings that Mountain Charter School has a reputation for addressing bullying. His school committee members wanted to know what Matthew was doing specifically to change the culture in his district so that Mountain Charter School was not perceived to be the only school that knows how to tackle bullying proactively. Matthews explained:

That's been the piece that I keep getting from the school committee: ...that place [Mountain Charter School]... squashes bullying and we don't. Now, we've invested a ton in programs and PD. I've seen the difference as a parent in terms of fires not being allowed to start and to burn out of control. But there's still definitely a perception that at...I don't think it's accidental that their [Mountain Charter School's] niche...tends to be with kids that many people would label as eccentric kids.

Matthew seemed to hold Mountain Charter School in high regard, and he felt that they were taking an approach to bullying that was working for a certain type of kid. Although he has not worked collaboratively with Mountain Charter School around issues of bullying, he responded to the charter school's ability to provide a positive culture for their students with an investment in his own faculty's professional development in this area.

Professional Development: Alternative Programs

Other superintendents, like William, mentioned that they recognized that the charter in his district has been successful in reaching out to the most marginalized populations in Massachusetts. He understood that there might be professional development opportunities for

his staff where they could learn from the expertise of the charter-school teachers. Rather than doing his own professional development in isolation, Matthew reached out to the charter school to provide professional development for their staff. He believes that this collaborative professional development has made his district stronger.

I think it's a public option that we willingly partner with... and we know that it has a place and actually methods that go on that have helped us. They have come and done professional development in our district. Working with some of their ideas on how they work with the most troubled kids. So there has been trickle-down effect, and it made our home alternative programs for those kinds of kids stronger. So there was really the yin and yang that was expected from a charter world. We got something and the public got something that we wanted and that we weren't delivering and couldn't deliver in the traditional public school system.

Matthew had very strong views on the funding formula and how competition has led him to make tough choices, but he did not hesitate when speaking about how the niche of the charter school in his district was serving a certain type of student that had been marginalized by society. In some respects, whether there is shared professional development depends a great deal on the relationship between the superintendent and the executive director of a charter, and on whether there is mutual respect. If there is, then, at times, this can lead to shared professional development centered on administration.

Professional Development: Administration

Some superintendents attempted to reach out to charters in their district to find common ground in terms of administrative professional development. Frank, an urban superintendent, stated that he respects the executive director in his charter school and has sought ways to include her in his administrative professional development.

We have a superintendents' breakfast once every Friday, one Friday a month, at Paulburg College. They put the agenda together, they run like a PD. And two years ago, Gwynn approached me and said, "Do you think they [would] let me in?" And I said the same thing. "I don't see why not?" So, I brought it to the superintendents and said, "Can you think of a reason why?" So, she attends those now...as a director.

This type of collaboration was unique in our study. Very few superintendents spoke of a relationship with the charter school executive director that mirrored the type of mutual respect mentioned by Frank.

According to MGL, 1993: MGL, 2010, Ch. 71, Section 89, some aspects of the charter law were designed, "to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education...to provide teachers with a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction and school structure and management." One wonders whether the designers of the legislation would have predicted that the focus of administrative innovation would be the marketing and promotion of the district school. When the designers of the law were hoping for innovative "school structure and management", did they really envision superintendents spending school resources to hire a PR consultant? The few examples of adding an innovation school in order to provide added learning time opportunities may be an administrative adjustment welcomed by proponents of the Education Reform Act. Although there were some examples of charters and districts collaborating around professional development, the data suggests that they are few and far between.

By investigating the data surrounding instructional innovation, patterns emerge that indicate that "the development of innovative programs' was stimulated in the district school by the presence of charters, yet many of these initiatives target students perceived by the superintendent as most likely to leave, namely those students who are high achievers.

Instructional Innovations

It will be recalled that the purpose of the study is to investigate specific innovations launched by superintendents in response to charter schools, both administrative and instructional. There are a number of instructional innovations that are potentially influenced by the presence of charter schools.

Specialized Programs and Curriculum

In the survey, superintendents were asked about select initiatives their districts had undertaken that are, in part, influenced by the presence of a charter school option for their students. Superintendents could select more than one initiative. Of the 33 superintendents who indicated that they were launching an initiative, 15 respondents, or 45%, reported they were *designing specialized programs at least in part in response to the presence of charter schools*. Fourteen of them selected another initiative as well. Among instructional innovations, the design of specialized programming had the highest percentage of respondents. Twelve respondents, or 36%, reported they were advancing new curriculum and instruction initiatives, at least in part, in response to the presence of charter schools. Eight of them selected another initiative. As the design of a specialized program often has a direct impact on curriculum, it was beneficial to consider both categories simultaneously to see if specific patterns emerged from the data. Taken together, 81% of superintendents who answered this question indicated that their instructional innovation focused on specialized programs, curriculum and instruction.

The survey asked superintendents to provide a written response about launched initiatives. The qualitative data provided a greater degree of specificity regarding examples of specialized programs as well as new curriculum and instruction initiatives that superintendents have implemented. Distinct themes emerged, especially a focus on specialized programs being introduced by superintendents. (Table 4c 4) In order to assist my analysis, I took each response

and placed it in a specific category. The three categories are: **Programs Serving High Achievers**, for **Language Programs**, and **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs**. The responses below are taken verbatim from the responses of the superintendents to survey Question 12.

Table 4a 4: Survey responses that included description specialized programs.

"In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiative that you think would be helpful for our study".

| Programs Serving High Achievers | Language programs | Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) Programs |
|---|--|--|
| Advanced Academies | Revised the entire middle school program, to include Latin for every 6 th grader. | Blended learning opportunities |
| Honors Academy at HS | Adding Latin. | STEM |
| Advanced Academic Learning Coaches at MS and Elem | Foreign Language at Elementary Level | Providing an Advanced Math coach for Middle School. |
| Added a Gifted Program | Added Chinese | Reviewing and revising the STEM education, along with a significant increase in technology capabilities. |
| Keeping up our AP offerings | | More STEM related initiatives |
| Elementary gifted math program | | Engineering |
| AP programs | | New focus on STEM |
| Honors at Middle School | | Innovative programs: Robotics and Maker Space |
| We have developed several Innovation School Initiatives, Tools of the Mind for Kindergarten, Advanced Placement type classes beginning in elementary school | | STEM Academy for 7/8 in high school and splash-up planning for enhanced high school program |
| MMSI AP grant, Academic Success Centers at MS and HS | | Our district added an advanced math coach program at our middle schools. While we would have pursued anyways, we also have added a 1:1 technology program at our middle schools which will move into our high school |
| More AP courses | | |
| Elementary gifted math program | | |
| Math options for very talented Honors Academy at HS, Advanced Academic Learning Coaches at MS and Elem | | |
| International Baccalaureate (IB) | | |

Keeping AP offerings and More STEM related initiatives was noted in the section of the survey that asked superintendents to identify the change of pace or level of priority for initiatives they planned to do anyway. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, seven specifically mentioned the creation of a specialized program and/or curriculum when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools.

Programs Serving High Achievers

The vast majority of superintendents developed instructional innovations that targeted the population most likely to participate in advanced or honors courses in the face of pressure from charter schools. Frank, an urban superintendent, went so far as to create an honors academy within the middle school. He did so in response to his perception that he was losing high achieving students

Here's the downside, we often times lose those kids. So we get them to the finish line, ready to perform at a junior-senior level of high school and they go to private schools, school choice, the charter school or the tech school. So all those people get the benefit of their MCAS test. So this year I created this Honors Academy. We accepted 54 of those into the honors academy at Paulburg High School. They have four of our best teachers. I got them each a chrome tablet. They have a very different kind of schedule of honors courses and even have AP courses and we created an honor's compact with Paulburg College, that if they maintain their grade average, they will automatically be accepted at Fitchburg State in their honors program. They'll get \$2,000 scholarship each year and starting the day they started our honors academy they get a Paulburg College green card to access all activities, library, and their parents can take free courses at Paulburg College...And that's a five-year formal compact with the president and I signed this formal agreement. So, that's my competitive nature.

The theme of competitive pressure as a reason to launch an instructional initiative was echoed by Harrison, the superintendent from Stoddard. He explained that, “It would seem that all of our initiatives are a little more pressure packed.”

Matthew, an urban superintendent, relayed that he responded to this pressure by adding AP offerings as a way to attract the attention of parents that may be considering other options. As a parent himself, he said that he knew he was acting “selfish” but “I know that my kids, all of whom I like to consider are really smart, can start taking AP course in their 9th grade year if they want to. That’s a hook that keeps some people hanging on.” Matthew believes that the AP offerings that he has implemented are a draw, even for kids who initially choose the charter school. He explained that, “We see kids that by choice go to charter school for middle school and they come back us for high school.” He believes that his AP offerings are also playing a role in the school-choice decisions made by parents. He felt:

I think there's probably some calculus about their parents thinking. Here's your odds of being valedictorian in Amandosh versus valedictorian in Highton, but here they also have 20 different AP options where each of those other schools they might have seven or eight. So there are folks ...who can see even from kindergarten to the finish line of high school saying “my child’s transcript is going to look richer because of the upper level academic offerings that we have.”

Matthew takes great pride in his AP offerings and believes that “we have a 150 more kids in AP...than we did it at the same time next year. That’s one marker of success as we hit the end of the first quarter... we can say a hundred and forty of those kids, those new kids, are still in the program.” Using a grant from the Gates foundation, he has attempted to provide greater AP access to a range of students. Innovations launched by superintendents that include language

instruction are introduced with the understanding that parents are considering curricular offerings at the charter school before making their decision.

Foreign Language Programs

Another method of attracting parents to stay is by offering a different range of language possibilities. At Stoddard, Harrison offered the instructional innovation of providing language offerings in the younger grades and in the high school. He believed that the charter was too narrow in its focus. This superintendent added language instruction along with other curricular changes that would focus on the whole child. Harrison explained “MCAS scores are very important because lots of things depend upon them, but we also believe in educating the whole child and we have actually added music and art and other non-core subjects...Mandarin in high school over the last few years, Spanish in sixth, seventh and eighth grade.” Urban superintendents like William have added Chinese as a way to differentiate his district from his competitors. William recognized the changing demographics of his town’s population and responded by specific instructional innovations. Like the Stoddard superintendent, William saw his district as offering a way to teach the whole child with a liberal arts education in response to the charter which, he believes, is only focused on a very narrow view of curriculum and instruction.

We started Chinese language for the first year this year in Northtown High School. We have a part-time teacher too and she had two sections with 20 kids. So there was a need and there was a growing Chinese population that is native to this country and is moving to this district. You start to ask yourself a question: how you can help this population along with our kids? There are actually a few Chinese kids in the course and white American kids, Latinos who can speak English and Spanish enroll to a Chinese course now. So that’s the way I think the public system should be. Just go

back to when the public system was designed; they weren't design to separate us. The truth is, they were designed to pull us together as one. That may sound narrow academically, but it's not. Civically and culturally speaking, it is to make us one; academically to feed all minds. I don't believe that pockets of charter schools can develop an individual in an isolated niche.

STEM Programs

Instructional Innovations around Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) was reported in the surveys and interviews as a response by some superintendents to the presence of charter schools in their districts.

A number of superintendents targeted their instructional innovations around advanced math and science. In Simsbury, Mark sought to fight the exodus of students to the charter school by adjusting the district's curriculum to meet the needs of his most advanced mathematics students. Mark said, "our numbers have been drastically reduced with kids leaving to go there the last few years. That's a combination of things that we did on our part to directly compete and one of those most concrete was to create an advanced math program in our middle schools, which we did in a way that works for us philosophically and actually was an area that we could strengthen." Mark's perception is that parents of students who achieve mathematically wanted to seek a more "elite" education for their child. In response, Mark created an honors math program in his middle school.

One of the other reasons parents had cited was that our middle school program, with the exception of 8th grade math, is the first time that we differentiate anything for sort of an honors level student and it was appealing to these families. They felt that their children needed to be in a more homogenous grouping system which they felt this charter school in [and] of itself provided because the students there, in their mind, were elite students

because they were going to an advanced school... We did create this program at the middle level, it's really the only thing we did directly in response to feedback we got that, "Well we don't think you have good enough curriculum or programming for my child who really is ready for a lot more when it comes to mathematics."

Eric, a superintendent in a rural tourist area, also launched instructional innovations around advanced mathematics. By creating a STEM Academy within his district, Eric sought to hold on to his brightest students who may have considered going to the local charter school. Eric remembers a conversation he had with parents about how their children would be prepared with 21st century skills. When asked what type of specialty program he should create, Eric responded that,

If I were in New York, Manhattan, I would be thinking about an academy for the performing arts [but in rural Massachusetts] ... I hear issues about erosion, ground water issues. Here we sit with water all the way around us and some of the premier international oceanic research facilities are right around us. What I would propose is that we open up a STEM academy... I know from a marketing point a view it's great at cocktail hour to say my kid goes to the academy. You know I did some private school in my background to so the marketing I understand...so we have planned an absolutely incredible program that I believe will become a national model.

Although administrative and instructional innovations have been separated for analysis in this study, there are instances where they influence one another in the face of charter school competition. Eric believes that a curriculum change with introduction of a STEM Academy also has a role to play in the marketing of his product. The development of specialized academies often requires such curricular flexibility that superintendents are turning to the concept of

innovation schools to achieve the type of autonomy with a specific school in the district as a way to keep certain students from enrolling in the charter school.

Innovation Schools and Specialized Programs

Another superintendent who sought to use instructional innovations to teach the whole child was Frank. He reached out to the local college and developed an innovation school focused on the arts. As he is in direct competition with a charter school only a few blocks from his high school, Frank is well aware that creating an arts academy might keep more students in his district. Frank worked with the local college to develop a specialized program that would target students who loved the arts.

It was triggered by that fact that their [the charter school's] premise is: we serve the whole child...They are putting a great emphasis on using art to serve the whole child.

Well, two years ago, I wrote for an innovation school. And in coordination with Paulburg College, we converted an arts academy, a middle school that was on the Paulburg College campus and an elementary school into a K-8, arts integrated innovation school...that has its own governing board. It has a lot of the characteristics of a charter school.that's what innovation schools do-- that's the difference. And it is on the Paulburg College Campus.

Although he mentioned the honors academy and the innovation arts academy as instructional innovations -- specialized programs that may be targeted to students who are considered gifted in academics or the arts -- he was the only superintendent who mentioned a specialized program that targeted a special population. He saw himself as a competitive innovator, one who builds in a longer day for the youngest population, but who is also willing to consider what is needed to support those students who have significant challenges.

I put in all-day kindergarten. So, we have all-day kindergarten at no cost. ...I closed those two buildings and moved everybody into the elementary schools, where I think they should be. So, the pre-K and the kindergarteners are getting to know that school and the teachers [are] getting to know them. And I offered full day kindergarten...if I am going to offer it, it's going to be free. So that's now six years we've had all-day kindergarten. When I came here we had no in-house autism programs. We started with pre-school and a kindergarten and now we are up to 8th grade. And every year we have added more grades. So we keep most of our autism students here in the district. And I think we have a really strong program.

Student Assessments

An instructional innovation that is closely linked to specialized programming and curriculum is student assessment. In the interviews, superintendents mentioned that they have sought to focus on student assessment as a way to differentiate their district from the local charter school

Of the nine superintendents interviewed, three mentioned the creation of student assessments when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district in response to charter schools. Other superintendents indicated that they, like Matthew, are using the instructional innovation of student assessments to minimize the achievement gap. William, an urban superintendent, explained that he credits his staff with targeting assessments so that his district can maximize student potential. He believes that the charter school is seen as a less attractive option to some families when they consider how his staff uses targeted assessments to help even the most disadvantaged students succeed.

Our kids come in with a gap. They come to us in kindergarten, the gap is there. They haven't been on a lap reading. They have no language skills; they don't know any

alphabet; and they don't speak English. So from day one, we are behind Ashton and Ralston, I am behind—out of the gate. But when you look at our testing in the district, it's all red. As we get to middle school and elementary, we start seeing more green. And by the time we get to high school, there we see lots of green. So the system works as we are closing that gap within the thirteen years that we have somebody out of the gate.

His perception that students and parents will stay in district if assessments can be used to show growth over time is a tremendous buffer against claims of academic excellence made by some charter schools. Numerous superintendents had the perception that the MCAS scores of charter schools are no better than those of the district, and their curriculum is certainly not as rich. Some stated that even with high-achieving students and their parents choosing the charter option, the real growth in student achievement can be found in the traditional public school.

Some superintendents indicated they had to refocus the conversation on student growth in conjunction with launching instructional innovations like more honors classes. In our interviews, some superintendents identified the introduction of advanced placement offerings as a way to respond to the presence of charter schools in their district. Matthew, an urban superintendent explained that he introduced more AP offerings as a way to differentiate his district from the others in the surrounding towns as he was losing some segments of his populations to Mountain Charter School, the local charter, and to other towns participating in school choice. He applied for a grant and was able to provide funds to teachers who taught AP classes. He explained that as he added these advanced courses, some difficult conversations ensued with his faculty around whether to eliminate prerequisites in order to expand access to more students. He did not want to see the AP offerings in his school being a de-facto private club. Matthew explained that,

This really blasts open the doors, you know, we get rid of prerequisites, we have student study sessions – it's really heavy with supports, to say. ..."You know what? Maybe last

year you couldn't get into the club. We think you can be in the club if you have this, this and this propping you up to get there"...It's scaffolding that reaches back even into the 5th and 6th grade which is what I particularly like about it.

Matthew was one of the few superintendents who indicated that their innovation might assist those students who are considered low-income. He based his model for AP access on the work of the Baachman Town schools.

Baachman, I think, is one of their poster child cities with an excellent record of taking under represented kids...in AP programs and making AP programs more robust in terms of minority kids, in terms of poor kids...So it's much more reflective of our general bodies.

Matthew's work is admirable, but it does not appear to be representative of how the vast majority of superintendents are implementing their AP and honors programs. Data suggest that innovations that surround student assessments are geared towards those students who would be achieving at a high level academically.

Technology

Although it has been identified that superintendents selected STEM as a specialized program and a curricular initiative, our interviews revealed greater specificity in terms of how technology is being introduced as an instructional innovation. One mentioned how technology could be coupled with other programmatic structures to reach out to marginalized populations. Frank, an urban superintendent, pushed for closing the achievement gap with some students, particularly those who had poor attendance. By using the instructional innovation of technology, he was able to create a transition academy from the middle to the high school.

Of the nine superintendents interviewed, five specifically mentioned the introduction of technology for students. Frank connected his district with professional development opportunities at Baachman Scientific University and he used their learned expertise to bring

technology to students who had not achieved great success in school. As one who had launched an honors academy to ensure that his best students would not be attracted to the local charter and vocational school, Frank was the only superintendent to mention that he created a curricular innovation that targeted students who struggled.

Two years ago, we were -- our attendance at the high school was down. There was that group coming down to the high school...that just were not succeeding, no matter what we did. Horrible attendance. Poor grades the whole bit. We took our four best teachers and we created an alternative, a transition , a 9th grade transition academy...gave them Chrome tablets, gave them four of our best teachers, gave those teachers common planning time and in the first months, their attendance beat the attendance of the whole rest of the school.

Superintendents said that they were aware of parental aspirations when deciding about a technological innovation.

Pedagogical Practice

Some respondents also mentioned how they had to re-train some teachers to meet the needs of their highest achieving students.

Of the nine superintendents interviewed, five specifically mentioned philosophy or approaches to education for students. Some of these instructional innovations were designed to ensure that the highest achieving students would not seek out other academic options. In Simsbury, Mark explored using coaches to work with his teachers so that they could retain some of the highest achieving students in math.

We provided some online programming to the Stanford EPGY program for fewer than 1% of the students who were operating at such a high level that a middle school math curriculum wasn't appropriate for them. They're already at sort of a high school level easily...The idea was to have this coach work with teachers to help them increase their

capacity to challenge kids who were ready for more and different in math and then also to do some pullout on a limited basis.

Frank also launched a coaching model as part of his instructional innovation. As noted below, a fundamental reason that he selected this particular innovation was in response to the claim that the high achieving students were not being adequately prepared for the rigors that would await them in the next stage of their academic careers. In a manner similar to that seen in Simsbury, Frank used coaches to work with teachers in the classroom to make sure that the most advanced academic students were being challenged.

I kept hearing from some parents, we are leaving because our kids aren't being challenged because you are having to work with these kids who aren't prepared. So I don't believe in 'gifted and talented' programs. So I found this program in Fairfax County, Virginia, called the Advanced Academic Learning Initiative and it's on a coaching model. So, three years ago I hired four people to come in and be coaches... They went in the classroom and the first thing that they do is help to teachers develop a strategies to identify accelerated students and then work with them in the classroom. Second tier is, they take a group of students from that classroom and work with them, for a period of time separately in advanced things. Not just giving them more worksheets but doing higher level. And then the third group is, they worked among the four elementary schools and then took a group of kids out after school, and work with them with advanced activities.

Other superintendents targeted their instructional innovation around the vocational curriculum as a way to prevent students from seeking placement in the regional technical schools. Matthew, an urban superintendent, challenged his district to make the necessary instructional adjustments so that anyone comparing the vocational-tech school and his district

would not be forced to leave based on the lack of rigor found in the technical programs in the high school. Although this is a different type of student, Matthew recognizes that he is launching these instructional innovations with the parents, as consumers, in mind.

I would call it initiative but we've really made an effort to ramp up our vocational programs and really the strongest piece ... that's an initiative comes from this office in simply putting out their publicly that we've allowed over the years to let our vocational programs become a de-facto alternative school. And that has eaten away over the past decade at the integrity of these programs and the quality of the graduates. And so you know, admitting that, and then saying we're not going to do that anymore, and living by it and having hard conversations with parents that are convinced that you know this hands-on experience will be life changing for the kids... We've got that going on which is exciting.

Not all instructional innovations are targeted towards academics Gloria, a suburban superintendent, who loses students to both private and charter schools, stated that she has remodeled her advisory program in part to look and feel like an experience that a student might have in another school. Again, like other superintendents who commented specifically about instructional innovations, the impetus for change came from conversations with parents who were demanding something different in the traditional public school. She explains that:

There is one thing that we're doing, but I think it's both in private schools as well as some other public and probably charter as well -- advisories. Actually, we have it all four years. So you have the same advisor all four years. So that's an example of something, that came our way, not necessarily from a program review, but from parents out there talking about that. Meanwhile, one of my goals has always been that every single child has an adult that if you ask them is there someone in this building you can go talk to, if he

were concerned they would say yes, and when we don't have that, we had it come up in one of our youth surveys, that not everybody felt that way. It was maybe, I don't know, 15% or 18% that said no. No, we are going to do something about it. So, it's that kind of thing, problem solving.

Consumer pressure that forces district innovation may be exactly what the legislators were anticipating when designing of the Education Reform Act of 1993. On the other hand, one can imagine that those who crafted the language of the law envisioned districts and charter schools collaborating around instruction and learning rather than having superintendents make changes simply based on parent pressure. Around the Commonwealth, there is some evidence that collaboration between districts and charters is occurring, albeit sporadically.

Professional Collaboration

Of the nine superintendents interviewed, eight specifically mentioned co-existing when talking of the district relationship to charter schools. Some superintendents identified opportunities that existed for teachers and administrators to share best practices between the charter and district school. In Nottingham, Keith mentioned that he has a positive relationship with the executive director in the local charter school. He explained that "they had a situation involved the police and they gave me a call and said, 'How do you handle this? What are the police like?' They had an incident and they reached out. I had reached out at one point when I was a principal because I had a student that I knew needed a different setting and they were very willing to explore it." In Northtown, William recognized that the charter school in his district has a unique perspective on how to educate marginalized students. He has worked with their executive director and learned from her expertise. William explained that,

To offer programs that are innovative and that districts can learn from, which is one of the original premises of the theory. Ashville Academy does it, from the extent of working

with highly troubled students. They deal with a lot of young women and their partner who may have had a child. They have kids as young as fourteen up to twenty-two, so they have a lot of young women who have babies. They offer daycare at the school. They deal with a lot of kids that were incarcerated or are in trouble in regular school districts. I have an open, progressive association with them, moving kids in and out of their system as needed. It is so progressive that actually we jointly went for some grant funds that they got and we have some of their people tutoring in some of our schools. So that charter school is filling a niche that we, as a public district, could not fill and as a result, I embrace its existence collaborativelyI think it's a public option that we willingly partner with and know that it has a place and actually methods that go on that have helped us. They have come and done professional development in our district.

In Paulberg, Frank believes that his relationship with Gwynn, the executive director, is also strong, and it has led to collaboration around professional development. In the interview, Frank said that "I have a really good relationship with South Lower Charter. Actually I just met with some of their staff. We met on Monday morning sharing ideas and things like that." Frank went on to say that his admiration for the executive director as an educator has made a tremendous difference in how they co-exist in the same town. He said that, "we both have very similar philosophical views of education. I kind of refer to Gloria as, you know, a real honest educator because she – I think that school takes everybody. They have not created any situations or procedures that I'm aware of that select out students." This has led special education staff from both schools to collaborative over how best to serve the needs of their special needs populations. Although these examples are noteworthy, most superintendents indicated that there was simply too much built-up animosity between charters and district schools to allow for meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

Barriers to Collaboration

In sum, these instructional innovations were either considered a worthy goal or else was an episode that occurred once without an effort to sustain the initiative. A more common refrain could be heard from Jonathan, the superintendent from Hillbury. He stated that, “if you fix the funding part of this then I think some of – I think the legislative ... intent was not to create these islands of innovation. They were to create these islands of innovation that would spread to the mainland. And ...that is not happening. The rising tide is not raising all boats.” The open response section of survey question 14 asked if: *Is there anything else you would like to share about your perceptions of or concerns about charter schools?* One superintendent responded, “I have had no meaningful models of innovation or sharing presented to me by any charter school. Another respondent stated, “They have not provided the innovation and model programs that were promised. We have more innovation going on in Banksford, Clarkford, Yorkville and Glendale that the charter schools we send students into.”

Matthew, of Highton, stated that, at times, pride gets in the way of professional collaboration. Yet, he recognized that the demographics of the state and the competition for resources do not lend themselves to fostering a need to collaborate between the district schools and the charters. He believed that the feeling of competition was, at times, coming from the charter schools. This kept them from sharing their best practices with the district schools, but he also felt that superintendents needed to be willing to learn from the charter school.

If part of the mandate for charter schools is that on their end I think they need to be less concerned about the competition and buy in to this notion that they need to share some of their secret sauce with the rest of us. The other side of that coin, as a group of superintendents, a group of principals or whatever, we need to get over ourselves and say that there are some kids that are getting a vastly better experience there than they

would with us, and if you can't admit that, you're blind. So we have to get over ourselves and this feeling like we have to fight this.

Matthew recognizes that this is difficult politically as schools are contracting in the face of this competition. Gloria, a suburban superintendent, would also like to see opportunities where charters, district schools and even private schools could collaborate and share ideas. She recognized that there may be too many obstacles to overcome, but she believes that "...they have a lot of exceptional teachers who are working really hard, so if you could partner so that ... students at that school could maybe take some courses at the charter school, there could be some interaction, [but] I'm sure that there would be problems." The data from the surveys suggest that the desire is there among some superintendents to share best practices, but there are often not avenues through which to disseminate the strengths of their program. Mark, the superintendent from suburban Simsbury, recalled a time when there was an effort to collaborate. He took it upon himself to reach out to the charter school in his district.

I did visit The Academy Charter School with a group of folks several years back.

Previous administration ... I don't really know the current administration, they were lovely, very receptive to us visiting. Saw some interesting things. Clearly there was a lot of strong academic stuff happening there, so... I don't worry that the kids who go there are not getting good education, which can be the case in some charter schools.

Even though the legislation in the Education Reform Act raised hopes that charter schools would serve to "provide models for replication in other public schools," (MGL, 1993:MGL, 2010 Ch. 71, Section 89) according to our data, professional collaboration is often replaced with superintendents taking on the role of policy advocate against the expansion of charter schools in their district.

Gloria may have captured the spirit of most of the respondents when she discussed the hope and potential of charter schools and district collaboration. Although she believes the two sides do not need to be in competition, the fact is that the potential for sharing innovation is lost due to the animosity that has been allowed to fester over time.

Instead of being competitors ...the view behind charters schools was let us go use your laboratories. We've got the good will, we've got the focus, the motivation, the ideas, the energy, the enthusiasm. We can be laboratories, for what would work, but then there's no real way beyond that. But if you partner, you know, as I said, there are going to be many problems.

For this reason, some superintendents have decided to resist any attempt at collaboration and have instead sought to find ways to resist the presence of charter schools in their district.

Discussion

Although the initial premise behind the development of charter schools was to unleash the power of the educational marketplace to foster innovations that would benefit all students, my findings indicate that most of the initiatives launched by numerous superintendents across the Commonwealth are targeted only to high achieving students. In numerous respects, this is the opposite effect from what was intended by economists who promoted the concept of the educational marketplace as a way to improve schooling for all students. John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) believed that government-supported options would stimulate a competitive effect among public schools and that this healthy competition would improve the education available for families. In Massachusetts, this does not appear to be the case. Since superintendents perceive that specific consumers -- the parents of high-achieving students or the high-achieving students themselves -- might be swayed to stay in the district school through particular innovations like offering more AP courses, or developing an honors academy, the innovation is accessible only to certain families. There are some examples where instructional innovations are

being targeted towards special education students and low-income students, but most innovations are AP/honors academy and therefore geared towards the high achievers.

Superintendents believe that it was not the charter school alone that led them to launch a particular innovation, but it allowed them the opportunity to ask the community for the resources needed to launch this innovation. Innovations that occur may have little to do with the charter school in the district, but the simple presence of an alternative for consumers plays a role in which initiative is adopted by the district public school.

It will be recalled that in my section of the Literature Review, Ellison (2009) indicated that numerous district public schools respond to charters by launching innovations not affiliated with curriculum, staffing, work conditions or programming but rather tied to advanced-marketing techniques. As described by Ellison,

The primary innovation in administrative functions appears to be the development of educational marketing practices. In contradistinction to the [research and development] laboratory of educational innovation envisaged by the market-model, schools operating in competitive environments face strong incentives to eschew innovative (risky) classroom practices focusing instead on symbolic representation and marketing to shape their student bodies (2009, p. 38).

Although some may argue that the presence of charter schools has created a two-tiered system in American public education, the role of school choice in select communities also plays a role in the stratification of a school system. I heard many testimonials about how school choice was segregating communities based on socio-economic status, and even race, as those parents with financial resources and access to education were deciding to have their sons and daughters educated with students who looked like them. Some critics of applying market theory to public education (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011) would recognize that, due to the varying

social/political contexts and complexities associated with the local control of schooling, it is not surprising that allowing choice to families has created the unintended consequence of dividing communities along socio/economic and even racial lines.

A number of superintendents stated that the charter school in their district exists to offer innovation to consumers, but is providing nothing different from the district public school. Although charters were designed to be laboratories of innovation that would be replicated by the surrounding districts, there is little evidence, from the perspective of the superintendents, that the charters are doing anything administratively or pedagogically worth emulating. Although it was recognized by some superintendents that the charter school in their midst serves a purpose in educating a very distinct population, whether students who had been incarcerated or young teen-age mothers, their structure was not one that could be replicated on a mass scale. Superintendents perceive that parents view the charter as an elite option in the district, although that there is little evidence to substantiate this claim. In response, many districts are hiring a PR director and/or launching marketing campaigns to highlight their achievements. As indicated above, these campaigns often focus on how the district is serving the more highly-advanced academic student, as it is the perception of some superintendents that these are the consumers most likely to leave the district to attend the charter.

Summary Statement

My mixed methods sequential explanatory designed study applied the economic theory of the educational marketplace to examine district superintendents' perceptions of charter school competition and its impact on the administrative and instructional innovations launched in their districts. The initial intent of the 1993 legislation on charter schools in the Commonwealth stated specifically that charter schools would serve as an impetus for the development and dissemination of innovation in the districts in which they were allowed to reside. The study

examined whether superintendents reported reform activities consistent with the language in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which was intended to spur innovation in charter schools and traditional districts.

This chapter looked specifically at innovations reported by superintendents that are influenced, at least in part, by the presence of a charter school in the district. This study highlighted a number of administrative and instructional innovations taking place as a result of increased competition from the educational marketplace. Charter schools were but one factor in the rationale for superintendents to select launching a specific innovation. Competition from school choice and vocational schools were referenced. The findings from this dissertation indicate that the innovations initiated by district superintendents are targeting those student populations who are perceived to be most likely to attend the local charter schools; namely those students considered by superintendents to be high academic achievers. Innovative strategies cited by many superintendents focused less on teaching and learning as promoted by the legislation but rather targeted marketing to potential consumers. Innovations that were aimed to support students identified as low-income, English language learners or special education were rarely highlighted by superintendents as a response to the presence of charter schools in their districts. Evidence indicated limited meaningful collaboration was occurring between districts and charter schools except in three isolated and unique circumstances.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Our research question sought to answer: *How does a superintendent's perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school in her/his district impact the development of district innovation?* In Ricciardelli (2014), our research focused on superintendents' perception of the education marketplace – ranging from enrollment trends to funding formulas and national and state policies. In Cummins (2014), our research focused on the perceptions of superintendents about the types of students most and least likely to enroll (or stay enrolled) in charter schools and the types of parents most likely to seek choice options and how those characteristics influenced the competitive pressure faced by traditional districts. In Steedman (2014), our research focused on the ways superintendents reported responding to the competitive pressure from charter schools – noting both innovative and not innovative reactions, and noting patterns in the types of parents/students particular innovations and actions appear to be designed to retain or attract. The following sections will demonstrate various ways in which perceptions of market pressure (Ricciardelli, 2014), nuances to the types of pressure experienced (Cummins, 2014) and actions taken by superintendents (Steedman, 2014) intersect revealing trends and patterns that lead us to overarching conclusions. In Chapter 5, overarching conclusions and patterns between our lines of individual inquiry are synthesized in pursuit of implications for district leaders, policy and practice, and future study. Table 5-1 displays the synthesis of findings in Ricciardelli (2014), Cummins (2014) and Steedman (2014).

Table: 5-1 *Themes from Chapters 4 (Ricciardelli, Cummins & Steedman) (Superintendents' Perceptions and Reports)*

| Themes | Perception of Marketplace (Ricciardelli, 2014) | Characteristics (Cummins, 2014) | Example of Innovation (Steedman, 2014) |
|--|--|--|---|
| Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts | Charter schools exist in a landscape of other choice | Lack of support for students with disabilities and other high cost students | Revamp/start programs to compete with technical schools; capital and technology improvements; Training for teachers to improve skills targeting specialized populations |
| Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds | Enrollment/Funding implications; difficult decisions about staffing and programming | Types of students and parents leaving ("low cost" "high performing") increases this pressure; budget cuts cause more to leave; other cuts affect other kinds of students | Pressure to keep certain kinds of students influences district's innovative priorities |
| Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers | Parents (as consumers) are perceived to be making choices – but because they are not paying for it, it not a rational market | More engaged parents are making choices ; choices perceived to be to support private goals, not community needs | Specific programs targeting marketing, outreach and communications to parent community |
| Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities | Charter Schools serve to separate communities and decrease democratic principles | Underrepresentation of some populations; perceived homogeneity; focus on high performers | New program development seems to cater to high performing students (honors, AP, etc) |
| Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications | Fairness in charter market – funding formula unfair | Expense higher than the expense to educate charter choosers; charters serving high needs students results in less pressure and more collaboration | Advocating and taking active stance in opposing charter schools |
| Limited Realization of Legislative Intent | Implementation not as intended legislatively | Market does not benefit all learners | Funding formula disincentives collaboration and sharing of best practices as intended by legislation |

Conceptual Framework

Our overarching questions as discussed in Chapter 1 addressed whether marketplace competition from charter schools spurred innovation in traditional public districts. We hypothesized that the perceptions of some Massachusetts superintendents are influenced by the presence of a charter school as well as by other school choice options in their district and this, in turn, impacted their perceptions of the competitive education marketplace. Our conceptual framework (Figure 1-1), attempted to convey how market pressure and charter school presence could influence how superintendents across the Commonwealth perceive this competition. Our survey and interviews have provided insight as to how superintendents have responded to this competitive pressure, mainly by allocating both human and financial resources in the name of innovation as a way to blunt the impact of these market forces.

Do superintendents feel the pressure of market forces from charter schools? The answer is yes. In our survey, we heard from 61 superintendents, approximately twenty-two percent of the Commonwealth, and there is indication that competitive pressure is felt. Our nine interviews produced specific times when a superintendent stated that s/he felt the presence of charter schools had led the superintendent to consider ways in which to respond to this market-based pressure.

Expanding Choice Options in Massachusetts

All of the superintendents interviewed in the study acknowledged the presence of educational options to students within their respective districts in addition to charter schools. These options include inter-district school choice, regional vocational-technical, and private schools. While the focus of this study was on the competitive pressure of charter schools on public school districts, data from superintendents indicate that the competitive pressure they are experiencing emanates from a larger landscape of schooling options. Upon beginning our research we did not anticipate that these other educational options and their competitive

pressure would be discussed by superintendents as extensively as they were, but given the importance placed on them by many of the superintendents who were interviewed, the research team felt compelled to report their effects. Among the most talked about non-traditional public school public options is the Massachusetts Inter-District School Choice Policy.

The inter-district school choice option as provided for in Massachusetts legislation provides parents with the option of enrolling their child in a district that has opted into the program. A number of superintendents acknowledged that the school choice program supports the school budget by allowing it to fill seats vacated by declining enrollment. While some communities have expressed concern about how opting into the school choice program would affect their district, challenging economic times have provided the impetus for school committees to opt into the program. Frank, the superintendent from Paulberg, acknowledged that financially, the school choice program hurts his district more than the funding he loses from charter school enrollment. He commented that, “It’s probably in the neighborhood of 350 students to 400 students that choice out...it’s like 1.5 to 2 million dollars out going annually.”

Superintendent respondents from suburban communities reported that they feel more competition from private schools than they do from charter schools. One superintendent concluded that, “We are not losing money ...the parents pay for that [private school education].” Superintendents noted that they also felt competitive pressure from technical and vocational schools, and that the marketing strategies were often very aggressive and in one case disingenuous to students with regard to admissions.

In describing parental engagement in school choice, superintendents recognized the importance of transportation access, which is often a function of geography and socioeconomic status. Superintendents also reported that parents opt for private schooling because of legacy traditions, and also because some parents feel that they need to place their children into different schools so that they can have access to a highly individualized education. The changing socio-

demographics and the declining economy had a major effect on the ability of parents to pay for a good that the public school was delivering. In Northtown, an urban area that has seen great demographic change in the past 20 years, the superintendent reported that his community has seen a dramatic reversal in the numbers of students who have opted to go to private schools.

Several superintendents expressed frustration over the ability of non-traditional public schools to be selective in serving “high cost students.” One superintendent commented that, “if a student in a wheelchair wanted to take welding in [the district school]...I have to find a way to let that happen. That could be a \$200,000 expenditure.... but the regional [vocational school] doesn’t...because there’s a fallback. There’s a mandated local education.” Frustration with the lack of responsiveness by vocational schools and charter schools in serving students with special needs was resounding.

In order to maintain student enrollment and compete within the landscape of school choice options including charter schools, vocational/technical programs, inter-district choice, and private schools, superintendents reported that they have been engaging in more assertive and strategic marketing campaigns; they have undertaken capital improvements; they conduct program and curriculum reviews on a periodic basis; and they have developed targeted programs designed to address the needs and desires of their respective communities. The superintendent of Stowville now requires his high school and middle school administrative staff to coordinate efforts to provide students with presentations to eighth grade students about the district’s high school program that is comparable to the local vocational/technical school’s “whiz-bang” presentations. The superintendent of Paulberg has ended a tradition of sending all grade-eight students on a field trip to the local vocational/technical school because of the disproportionate number of “top students” the school tends to admit to their program. The superintendent of Wincler reported having built a state of the art performance venue to compete with the schools that have comparable facilities in that district’s geographic area including private schools and

Regis Charter School. The superintendent of Wheatfield reports that her district conducts rotating self-studies of curriculum and programs, and that they make field visits to other public districts and private schools to get a sense of the larger picture and the attributes that may need to be revamped or bolstered so that the district can remain competitive with private, and vocational/technical high schools. The district of Hillbury has established a unique language immersion program and a progressive Montessori program to attract the largely middle to upper-middle class population in his community to support district schools over primarily private and parochial school options.

Perceived Consequences of Competition for Funds

Through the survey and semi-structured interviews we studied the topic of how superintendents perceive the effect of charter school enrollment on their districts, as discussed in our first Chapter 4 (Ricciardelli, 2014). Table 5-2a below illustrates that among the respondents in the survey, 31% of respondents indicated that they perceived charter schools had a *moderate* or *major impact* on student enrollment in their districts. Additionally, 45% of them reported that charter schools have either a *moderate impact* or *major impact* on the district budget. Deeper analysis of these data yields the following predictable finding: the higher the percentage of students enrolling in charter schools, the greater the impact on district budget, district priorities and decisions, and the credibility/reputation in the district as is illustrated in Table 5-2b. For example, in districts where less than 3% of students opt to attend a charter school 10% of reported responses indicated that there was *moderate* or *major impact* on district priorities and decisions. Compared to districts in which 3-6% of students opt to attend charter schools, 35% of total reported responses indicated that it had moderate or major impact, and 75% of total responses of superintendents reporting a 7-9% enrollment percentage indicate a perception that there has been moderate or major impact on district priorities and decisions. Similar percentage point spreads exist among perceptions of effects on district budget and credibility and reputation

above and below 3% thresholds.

We asked superintendents to identify one or more initiatives that they perceived had taken place as a result of charter influence in their district. Table 5.2c identifies the top four categories in which superintendents reported that initiatives had occurred broken down by enrollment percentage. Seventy-five percent of superintendents reporting a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated changes in curriculum and instruction. Forty-eight percent of superintendents with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated changes involving marketing materials and/or strategic communications. Fifty eight percent of superintendents with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had initiated capital improvements to buildings and infrastructure, and 27% of those with a 3-6% enrollment rate indicated that they had designed specialized programs. As is shown in Table 5.2c, percentages are lower for superintendents reporting both a 0-2% and 7% and greater enrollment rate. The tipping point therefore with regard to initiatives appears to be within the 3-6% enrollment rate range.

Table 5-2a

Percentage of Survey Respondents Reporting Charter School Impact by Attribute

| Attributes | No Impact | Minimal Impact | Moderate Impact | Major Impact |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Student Enrollment | 26 | 43 | 25 | 6 |
| District Budget | 24 | 31 | 23 | 22 |
| Access to Community Partnerships | 69 | 25 | 3 | 3 |
| Student Demographics | 45 | 37 | 7 | 10 |
| District Priorities or Decisions | 55 | 25 | 13 | 6 |
| Access to Extracurricular Facilities | 67 | 26 | 4 | 1 |
| Credibility or Reputation of Schools | 47 | 26 | 15 | 12 |

Note: Percentages are rounded to the tenths and therefore may not add up to 100% in each row.

Table 5.2b

Superintendents' Perception of Charter Schools on Various Attributes Having Moderate or Major Impact

| Respondents by Enrollment Percentage | District Budget | District Priorities or Decisions | Credibility/Reputation |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 0% – 2% | 33% | 10% | 15% |
| 3% – 6% | 82% | 35% | 53% |
| 7% – 9% | 80% | 75% | 75% |

Table 5.2c

Top Initiatives Reported by Superintendents by Enrollment Percentage

| Initiatives Reported | Enrollment Percentage | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| | 0-2 | 3-6 | 7+ |
| Curriculum & instruction initiatives | 17% | 75% | 17% |
| Marketing materials/strategic communications | 37% | 48% | 15% |
| Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure | 33% | 58% | 8% |
| Design of specialized programs | 27% | 27% | 20% |

Note: Survey respondents could identify multiple initiatives in their responses, and therefore percentage totals across rows do not equal 100%. Includes top four initiatives reported.

Table 5.3 Survey Responses: Likelihood of Advanced Students to Enroll in Charter Schools with Impact on District Budget

| Report of Charter School Impact on District Budget | Perception of Likelihood of Students with Advanced MCAS Scores to enroll in Charter Schools | | | | Total (N) |
|--|---|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| | Not Likely at All | Minimally Likely | Moderately Likely | Extremely Likely | |
| No Impact | 5 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 12 |
| Minimal Impact | 1 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 16 |
| Moderate Impact | 1 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 16 |
| Major Impact | 1 | 0 | 4 | 10 | 15 |
| Total (N) | 8 | 13 | 16 | 22 | 59 |

Although student enrollment certainly played a role in influencing the perception of the competitive marketplace, we found that the percentage of students leaving a district to enroll in a charter school may have less influence on how the superintendent experiences and reacts to that pressure than the type of students and parents reported to be most likely and least likely to leave. We found that superintendents in districts experiencing less than 1% of students leaving for charter schools reported perceptions based on reports from colleagues or based on previous experiences, but were not currently experiencing competitive pressure from charter schools. In some of these districts, however, school choice to neighboring districts, vocational schools and/or private schools were reported to be a greater source of competition for some districts with little charter school presence. We found that in both urban and non-urban communities reporting 1% -9% of their students enrolling in charter schools, many superintendents expressed that they felt competitive pressure exacerbated by the types of students leaving (disproportionately high achieving) and the types of students not leaving (disproportionately low achieving). We found that in three urban communities, with charter enrollment ranging from 1% to 4%, there were reports of collaborative relationships and sharing of ideas between a charter school and the district – influenced by what the superintendents in these districts described as specialized programs and/or compatible leadership and vision for educating all students.

Several superintendents expressed concern, with regard to fairness, that charter schools exist to serve only a segment of the population, and leave out students with special needs, English language learners, those with behavioral problems, and those without parents who are vested in advocating for their child's education. One superintendent expressed that lack of oversight allows charters to cherry pick and churn students with special needs. Another superintendent put it succinctly when he said,

“If I may use a baseball metaphor, Commonwealth Charter Schools (again, proper noun or not) start with a 3-0 count for their student achievement goals: they have strong and persistent parental buy-in, and they do not have serious behavior issues, whether related to disabilities or otherwise. The challenge of educating a child with the advantage of engaged parents, no matter how demographically "disadvantaged" the child is, is simply not as great as it is for regular public schools.”

Another superintendent expressed concern that charters were “selective in not accepting students with disabilities” and when students are diagnosed with a disability “they are asked to return to public schools.” A common sentiment is that charters “are benefiting mainly middle class parents who do (did) not want their children attending ‘bad’...public schools” where the population was ‘not like’ the persons sending their children to a charter school.” Fairness and equity was questioned by a superintendent who said, “Charter schools benefit greatly by not having major budget drivers like mandated: Special Education tuitions, collective bargaining, transportation expenses, & school committee and finance committee scrutiny.”

Matthew from Highton, a superintendent who describes himself as “not being a charter-hater” acknowledged that charter schools serve a legitimate need and says that, “my well-educated guess is that many students begin at the charter as a result of having been bullied, or having perceived being bullied.” He believes that one charter school in his geographic area serves this population of children well. However, this superintendent acknowledges that

“(there) exist(s) a pattern of taking students and sending them back if it does not work out—deal-making along the lines of “you can stay here and repeat ninth grade, or return to your home school as a tenth grader.”

A response from the survey shows frustration both in terms of the population of students left in the “real” public schools and the funding mechanism. One anonymous respondent wrote that he/she believed it contributed to the underfunding of “REAL Public Schools and skim off the more talented students leaving school districts with the more challenging students to educate with less funding. The superintendent of Stoddard comments that, “You know charter school competition is simply an arbitrary, capricious fact of where somebody decides to set up their charter school.” He went on to describe what he had learned from colleagues in another region in which the competition from charter schools and private schools is particularly challenging for what he described as “poorer” districts in that region

In the survey, superintendents were asked to identify the likelihood of different students groups to enroll in charter schools. Of the respondents, few indicated that they thought ELL students, special education students, and students that are recipients of free and reduced lunch would be *moderately likely* or *extremely likely* to enroll in charter schools. The response percentage for each of those student groups was 6%, 6%, and 5% respectively. The response percentage for those superintendents indicating that students with Advanced MCAS scores would be *moderately likely* or *extremely likely* to enroll in a charter school was much higher at 63%. We then delved deeper and viewed the specific initiatives undertaken by superintendents as a response to retaining students with higher achieving students as indicated by their Advanced MCAS scores (See 5-4). Of those superintendents indicating that change has occurred as a result of wanting to retain higher achieving students, the highest percentage of them, 41%, indicated that they have embarked on a program of strategic communications and marketing

materials. Twenty-two percent of them report initiating specialized programs, and 16% report new curriculum and instruction initiatives.

Table 5-4:

Perception of Likelihood of High Achievers to Enroll in Charter and Responses to Charter Presence

| <u>Initiatives in part influenced by presence of Charter</u> | <u>Perception of Likelihood of Advanced MCAS Scorers to Enroll in Charters</u> | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| | <u>Not likely at all</u> | <u>Minimally likely</u> | <u>Moderately likely</u> | <u>Extremely likely</u> | <u>N</u> |
| New curriculum & instruction initiatives | 0 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 12 |
| Modifications to school hours of operation | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Launching of marketing materials or strategic communications about district programs | 0 | 3 | 9 | 15 | 27 |
| Modifications to work conditions for staff | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 11 |
| Design of specialized programs | 0 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 15 |
| Change in pace or level of priority for initiatives we planned to do anyway | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| None | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 22 |
| Total Responses | 5 | 12 | 16 | 21 | 54 |

In the semi-structured interviews, the research team delved even further to learn about the specific marketing, specialized programs, and curriculum and instruction initiatives undertaken by district leaders to attract and retain these higher achieving students. All superintendents who were interviewed expressed the need for them to communicate their district's merits and achievements to their respective communities. All could articulate specific marketing and or strategic communications they have undertaken over the past several years to counteract the competitive pressure they have been seeing from various out-of-district educational sources including inter-district school-choice, vocational/technical education, and private and parochial schools. In Northtown, Stoddard, Paulberg, Wincler, Stowville, Hillbury, Nottingham, and Highton superintendents reported that academies and/or specialized programs designed to address the needs of higher achieving students have been established.

Our initial results from 61 Commonwealth superintendents who filled out the survey, and from nine individual interviews seem to substantiate our initial hypothesis as represented in our conceptual framework, namely, that one component can influence the others without requiring a sequential relationship. We anticipated that the manner with which superintendents have experienced the pressure of charter schools also impacted how they perceived charter school competition, and how they react to that competition. The data collected substantiate this claim.

Response of Superintendents to Parent Consumers

Throughout our study, superintendents consistently identified parents as consumers in the educational marketplace. While some superintendents used market-based terms such as “consumer” and/or “market”, others described conditions consistent with marketplace features without using specific terminology. Mark, from Stowville, stated that in his district, students have the opportunity to go to a charter school that includes the word “advanced” in its title. Mark argues that in his case, parents are not participating in a “rational market” in which price

and product influence winners and losers. First, parents aren't "footing the bill" and secondly, parents aren't fully investigating the charter school's achievement and outcomes. He perceives that they are choosing to enroll because there is an assumption that this is a school for "advanced" students. Similarly, Eric from Winclev reported the story of running into a mother of a sophomore who had had a "great 9th grade year" but still went to the charter in 10th grade because her name was pulled from the waiting list. Eric noted that this perception of long waiting lists and elite nature of a school influenced perceptions of opportunities available to students by virtue of enrolling in an elite school as opposed to being based on a negative experience at the traditional public school. Eric, Mark, and several others described this marketplace phenomenon as "getting a private school education" with public dollars. Since parents are not funding this choice, many superintendents argue that it is not a real market since parents go shopping for a choice with someone else's (the district's) funds.

Although superintendents report conditions that are inconsistent with a rational market, it was reported by more than half of the interviewees and survey respondents that certain kinds of parents were aware of and taking advantage of charter schools. These parents were described as "highly engaged" by one superintendent; another superintendent described them as parents who were likely to have "had their kid on their lap reading a book." Several superintendents described parents who were likely to choose charters as being those who "are involved" or "care" about education, or simply who "know" about the options available to them. These parents were described – to varying degrees – as making a choice that they believed was best for their child. Some participants noted that this threatened to re-segregate schools if parents could choose to place their child in a school with other kids like him or her. Other participants noted that democratic principles of public education – to serve ALL students - was in conflict with the market-based programs; to paraphrase one superintendent, parents are often making a choice seeking the answer to the question, "What can be done for MY child?" while superintendents are

required to seek answers to the question, “What should our schools do for our ALL of our communities’ children?”

In addition to superintendents perceiving that a certain group of parents were being attracted to charter schools, most superintendents indicated that certain types of parents were left out of the market place. These parents were described as being unaware, uninformed, or unable to meet the parent requirements. One superintendent reported that charters could require school-day volunteering and attendance at meetings – reducing access to parents who could not afford to take time off from work, or for whom transportation or language was a barrier. Mark felt that the parents of students who were average or struggling learners would be dissuaded from even applying to the charter school saying, “That’s not for my kid; that school is for advanced kids.”

As noted in the third Chapter 4 (Steedman, 2014), marketing, advertising and strategic communications were reported to be a prevalent response to charter school competition. Given the perceptions of superintendents about certain kinds of parents being drawn to charter schools, it is not surprising that superintendents have responded with outreach, public relations, and strategic communication – including advertising. Our study did not attempt to characterize the types of communications or the target audience for those communications. However based on other findings in our first Chapter 4 (Ricciardelli, 2014) and in our second Chapter 4 (Cummins, 2014), we believe there is likelihood that communications may be targeting the parents of higher achieving students. Given that in the first Chapter 4 (Ricciardelli, 2014) we learned that superintendents perceive parents to be the choosers - or consumers - although not always based on rational market-driven reasons, and in our second Chapter 4 (Cummins, 2014) we learned that superintendents largely believe that more engaged parents are likely to be making the choice to leave the district – it would be logical to assume marketing and advertising responses to charter school pressure are likely to be geared to that same population of parents that one superintendent noted “was cognizant enough to know the options out there.” It seems that superintendents are

responding to parents seeking the best option for their child by making sure that the parents inclined to make a choice are aware of how their own public district may in fact be the best personal choice for the child.

Perceptions of Equity, Diversity and Priorities

Many superintendents responded in the survey and in interviews that they were concerned that charter schools (and school choice) presented equity dilemmas – particularly when parents were perceived to be making choices based on desires for homogeneity or being with like students. One superintendent described parent choice behavior as “white flight” and another superintendent described an inability to combat “deep seeded beliefs” of parents that caused them to prefer sending their child to school with fewer “brown” or “poor” students.

Parent choice behavior and reasons were one factor in superintendents’ perceptions of equity threats. Several also referenced charter schools as limiting diversity – particularly for high needs or lower performing students. Superintendents reported that students were “returned” to the district when a charter school identified that a child’s needs were too great and that they “didn’t have a program for them.” Other superintendents reported “counseling out” behaviors that included convincing parents that it was in their best interest to voluntarily withdraw from the charter school, thus defaulting to the local public option. Still other superintendents reported that charter schools were designed to prevent parents of certain kinds of students from even considering the charter as an option and/or that charter schools were simply not accessible to portions to parents who were less engaged or did not have access to information about choice options for a variety of reasons.

Despite this concern about equity and “resegregation of schools” as one superintendent named it, there were no patterns of responses reported by superintendents that served to address these equity concerns. It could be argued that efforts to attract or retain high performing students could be designed to maintain diversity in a student body and to, as one superintendent

called it, “retain the brain trust” as high performing students and highly engaged parents clearly have benefits to offer a school community. However, we found it interesting that although superintendents consistently reported concern that charter schools were underserving special education, ELL and in some cases lower income students – there was only one interviewee who indicated collaborating with a local charter school to build their capacity to better serve higher need students.

Perceptions of Funding Formula and Implications

From the data gathered in the surveys and the interviews, a perception shared by a large number of superintendents was that the way the charter school law has been implemented in the Commonwealth is unfair. There were some who understood the educational rationale for the design of charter schools, and stated that the reform might have resulted in widespread educational innovation across the state, if not for implementation of an unjust funding scheme. In its current iteration, however, it is perceived by superintendents that the way the funding is formulated is a considerable liability to the district public school.

There is a perception that the students who score the highest on MCAS as well as other high achieving pupils are leaving the district schools to enroll in charter schools. Motivated by either their own internal academic drive or else by parents who view the charter as a more elite option, participants in our study perceive that high performing students are seeking enrollment in charter schools far more frequently than Special Education, ELL or economically disadvantaged students. Superintendents believe that this choice by the savvy consumer is having a direct impact on their bottom line. This causes students who cost little, yet who have the potential to boost test scores, to seek alternatives outside the district, disproportionately leaving behind higher cost, lower performing students.

There are some reported instances where charter schools are serving a high-needs population of students who had not been successful within the district public schools. Examples

of this can be found in charters that might serve a higher percentage of students on the autism spectrum or schools that serve teen-age parents or students who have been incarcerated. As a result, there is less market pressure felt in the district that send these students to these charter schools with a unique mission and/or approach to learning. Our data indicate that in these instances, where the charter serves a particular niche for students whose needs were not being met in the traditional setting, there seems to be greater programmatic collaboration between the charter and the district schools.

As these instances of collaboration were not the norm, most superintendents indicated that they were not interested in collaborating with charter schools, as most felt that in terms of academic programming, student support, athletics or the arts, the charters were not providing anything particularly innovative in comparison to what was being offered in the district. This led some superintendents to take on a more active, political role in advocating for a specific policy to be changed. Of the nine superintendents interviewed, four mentioned policy advocacy when talking about a particular innovation they have launched in their district. Matthew, an urban superintendent, indicated that the expanded presence of charters has led him to take on a more political role in fighting against their expanded presence in his district. He was not against the rationale of charter schools, but he did not believe that the concept or niche as described by the proponents of this particular charter differed from what he and his fellow district superintendents could offer. He mentioned how he worked with other superintendents to defeat the introduction of a second charter school close to his district.

There was a charter school application to go into Great Horizon and we fought against that one very hard. If the folks who were bringing it forward had a good plan, I don't think we probably had enough fight to defeat it. It was more about the quality of the plan... I could not as an educator see anywhere where this place would be serving any

individual or group of kids better than how I knew we can serve them or any of our neighbors can serve them.

William, an urban superintendent, explained that he has taken a very active role in trying to defeat any proposed legislation that would remove the cap on charter schools. He believes that the presence of charters have led to a new level of advocacy not before seen in Massachusetts superintendents.

My mantra to our association was that we have to start taking a more active role in policy setting of the state at the state house and with the DESE. Our call to action was labeled *Lead Up*. The superintendents have to start the *Lead Up*, leading up and influencing the policy because the statehouse was doing things that they haven't done before. We actually brought 86 superintendents to some hearings last spring...I think that superintendents and public school leaders have to start raising a voice and educating bureaucrats who make rules because they are approached by a charter school body and a corporate body to start schools. We have to start pushing back against them. We haven't ever pushed back. What we see here is part of our initial stages to push back and we are going to push more and more.

Although charters have been growing in more urban centers, Jonathan represents a rural district but has taken up the fight against charter school expansion. He frames his advocacy as a type of innovation.

Compliance is the enemy of innovation.... I think funding needs to be addressed. I think if funding can be addressed then local school districts will not see charters as the enemy and we can start actually saving some money by collaborating and cooperating. Charter schools are the drunken brother-in-law of families in Massachusetts. The superintendents want nothing to do with them, they won't cooperate with them, they won't collaborate with them, they won't do anything. They tolerate them and hope they go away. And

that's wasteful and that is inappropriate....you know, local public schools can learn something from them. But that information is stuck in that charter school because nobody's talking to them because we don't like them...because they took our money away.

Limited Realization of Legislative Intent

The anger and resentment felt by some superintendents in the Commonwealth certainly goes against the initial hopes of the designers of the 1993 Education Reform Act. As the data suggest, the emotion surrounding the funding formula has inhibited many superintendents from reaching out to charters to find common ground.

The competition that is brought forth by the marketplace seems to be having the opposite effect from what the legislators' intended. Although there were examples of specific innovations that were developed in response to the presence of a charter in the district, like new STEM initiatives and innovation schools that focus on the Arts, the fact that superintendents in our survey listed advanced marketing and targeted communications as the most selected innovation present speaks volumes as to the impact that marketplace competition has had on districts in Massachusetts. The qualitative section from our survey indicated that this specific innovation was, by far, the most frequent innovation taking place across the Commonwealth in response to marketplace pressure. As one superintendent indicated,

Not just due to charter schools, but with their impact and the overall impact of a declining student population we have closed two schools in eight years. Annually, we are losing over two million dollars to charter schools. The students leaving are typically already proficient and advanced as measured by MCAS. We have had to spend additional money on marketing our district-print ads, radio, etc. to maintain the district's credibility.

We were able to determine that 18 out of 21 superintendents who responded that there was a major or moderate impact on enrollment in their district due to the presence of charter schools also launched innovations associated with marketing.

Massachusetts charter school legislation (MGL Ch. 79, Section 89, 1993; 2010) was intended to assist struggling schools and to infuse a sense of competition in the educational marketplace, in hopes that with a focus on those districts that can demonstrate student achievement would force lower performing, and even reform-resistant, schools to change or risk losing market share. All boats would rise in this grand experiment. The evidence suggests, however, that superintendents do not believe that the hopes of the ERA have not come to fruition. Superintendents perceive that consumers view the charter as an elite option. These consumers will, therefore, seek opportunities at the charter, disproportionately leaving behind students who may be more expensive to educate and who may be less likely to be high performers. Rather than helping the most academically challenged students, actions often were targeted to those students that the superintendents did not wish to lose because of the impact on budgets and test scores. The vast majority of specific programs identified as an innovation were Honors Academies, more AP courses and programs that supported the gifted and talented. Very few superintendents mentioned a specialized program to serve Special Education, ELL or low-income students. It is important to note that superintendents who reported that a charter was doing well with these populations also reported reaching out for support and to learn from or collaborate with charter schools. One superintendent noted that because of the success rate the charter had with his “troubled students” the district had collaborated with the charter school and had improved its own alternative programs as a result.

Although a list of innovations by charters is revealing and it aligns with our overall research question and our conceptual framework, we sought to investigate possible influences on why superintendents were launching particular innovations. We investigated patterns between

the perceptions of superintendents of the reason why they believed the parents, as consumers, appeared to select a charter school (e.g. parents saw the charter school as an “elite option” for their children) and the type of innovation launched by the district. Although a superintendent could choose more than one innovation, our data indicate that the launching of a specialized program and/or curriculum and instruction initiatives was selected by forty percent of the superintendents who perceived that parents select charters as an elite option *Often* and *Most of the Time*. Fifty-six percent of respondents who perceived that parents select charters as an elite option *Often* and *Most of the Time* also replied that they had launched marketing materials and strategic communications.

Our research team heard from superintendents who blamed the funding formula for disincentivising collaboration and the sharing of best practices. Even when both the charter and district had similar AP programs, there was no evidence that teachers and administrators were attempting to share best practices because the structure, as it stands now, forces both sides to attempt to out-perform the other. Although there were examples when district schools and charters felt like they could-co-exist and, at times, worked with one another around select issues, like bullying, the practice was not widespread.

Conclusions

Our study emerged as relevant and timely as demonstrated by the level of interest from our participants. Charter schools are a hotly debated topic in Massachusetts and superintendents who volunteered to participate in our survey and interviews expressed great interest in sharing their opinions, experiences, and suggestions related to the topic. We learned that overall, charter schools are certainly impacting traditional public school districts in a variety of ways and that districts are responding in a variety of ways. Most prominent within our study is that superintendents reported feeling a greater amount of competitive pressure when charter schools are perceived to be attracting high performing students from their districts and/or are perceived to be underserving higher needs students. Within this competition for higher achieving students, superintendents reported concerns about equity and diversity but also largely reported responding to this competition with strategic communication, marketing and development of programs that, at least on the surface, appear to be targeting higher achieving students and their parents. With these overarching conclusions in mind, the final section of our study will include a review of the limitations to our study, policy recommendations, recommendations for district leaders, and will conclude with implications for future study.

Limitations

- Email and omission of research team member. The email that was originally distributed to recruit participants included the language “participation in this study will assist us as we advocate in the charter experience” as well as omitted the name of one of our research team members who also happens to be the principal of a charter school.
- Small N in general for survey respondents. 22% of all MA Superintendents
- Very small N (5) for urban districts. 77% of charter schools exist in urban settings
- Omission of Connecticut Valley Superintendents Roundtable.

- Possible interviewer influence on responses. Responding in interviews in ways that may have connoted agreement with opinions.
- Descriptive data incomplete. Survey did not ask for rural/urban/suburban designation but only district size and geographic roundtable.
- Did not provide an option related to offering training or support to charter schools in supporting high needs students.
- Interviewed three superintendents from districts reporting less than 1% of students leaving to enroll in charter schools. This presented limited information about competitive pressure given that these districts sent so few students out. Perhaps the team should have established a minimum enrollment rate before then proceeding to a geographic distribution.

Policy Recommendations

Massachusetts DESE to play a role in bringing district and charter school leaders together. Our recommendations for district and charter leaders, as well as for public policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, suggest the need to bring both sides together. Even though direct governmental interference may go against the concept of the free market, there may be select issues that state level policy-makers and the DESE could identify where it would be mutually beneficial for charter and district leaders to meet and share best practices.

The state needs to create policy incentives and remove barriers for district/charter school collaboration. Current policy is perceived by district leaders to have established a “zero-sum game” in which competition is perceived as creating an educational environment of winners and losers. At the base of this perception is the funding formula that is perceived to penalize public school districts by decreasing funding for their district based on charter enrollment. This “winner-loser” mentality is counterproductive to collaboration. Massachusetts should consider

enacting initiatives that stimulate collaboration instead of stifling it and thereby creating a “win-win” situation for all students.

The state should commission a study that identifies how the current funding formula affects both public school districts and charter schools. Both the survey and interviews indicate a resounding feeling of animosity toward the funding formula established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Per pupil expenditures of public school districts do not take into consideration their ability to provide an educational environment based on an economy of scale. Study respondents overwhelmingly expressed concern that competition cannot exist within a context in which the funding is unfairly distributed. This unequal playing field has contributed to a “quasi-market” – one in which pure supply and demand forces cannot operate fairly. Advocacy by district leaders about how the charter funding formula directly and adversely affects their school districts to lawmakers may eventually create a more even playing field for which competition can occur. Given that both districts and charter schools identify the funding formulas as being unfair or disincentivizing the enrollment of high needs students, the state should commission a study to measure the impact of the funding formula on equity in Massachusetts schools. Current policy exacerbates an existing equity problem in Massachusetts’ schools: higher cost students including special education and English language learners typically cost districts more money to educate – and they are perceived as the students less likely to apply and enroll in charter schools. Massachusetts policy needs to address how to increase the enrollment of these groups in charter schools, and mitigate the effect of the cost differentials among high cost and low cost students.

Recommendations for District Leaders and Charter Leaders

Maintain a balance between competition & collaboration. Given the current policy and funding environment that is perceived to promote competition and inhibit collaboration, it is our recommendation that district leaders make personal efforts to reach out to their local charter

school(s) in the spirit of creating the best public educational opportunities for all students. Our research has indicated that in a couple of communities healthy competitive and collaborative relationships exist and do benefit students by capitalizing on joint teacher professional development opportunities. Our study, however, has revealed that this is not the current norm. District leaders and charter school leaders should consider developing partnerships to address the under-representation of special needs populations including ELL students and students with disabilities. Competition will be most productive if district leaders and charter leaders seek examples of effective charter/district relationships as part of their advocacy.

District leaders must be political players. Public school superintendents would be well served to engage in the political process – both in their local districts and in the state-wide political advocacy arena. As the voice of their district, it is important that they engage in consistent dialogue with various constituent groups including students, parents, educators, town/city and state level policy-makers, and the local business community about the merits of the public school system. Education and advocacy beyond the typical communication media are important as the superintendent capitalizes upon his/her “bully pulpit.” District superintendents should engage in state level policy advocacy with an added emphasis on the equity issues that the current policy raises. It is important that this advocacy not only occur in the state bureaucratic framework of the DESE, but also perhaps more importantly in the legislative arena with regard to educational and advocacy efforts to state legislators. District leaders are highly respected members of the educational community and policy-makers often seek out their technical expertise regarding educational issues. Superintendents should consider more vociferous advocacy to policy-makers and make themselves available to them for advice and consultation about the direct effect of state policy on district schools.

District and charter school leaders should have an astute understanding of the funding formula. Given the complexity and nuance of the charter funding formula, it is

important for superintendents, business managers, building leaders, charter leaders, and community members to better understand the actual funding impacts in districts on an ongoing basis. This is especially important as district leaders engage in policy-level change in regard to the current funding formula. Our research has suggested that there is a wide range of the level of understanding of the complex formula – and its effects - among district level leaders.

Learn from charters that serve a particular need. A majority of the interviews with superintendents revealed that they were unaware of the niche or area of specialization of charter schools. Since legislation requires that charter schools identify their mission or area of specialization before getting state approval, each charter school must have a specific identifiable niche or goal. In some cases, the area of specialization can be a support to the public school district rather than a competitor. For example, one district superintendent reported that a local charter high school that addresses the needs of teens with one or more children of their own was actually a source of support for the district rather than a source of competition. He reported that he maintains a professional relationship with the leadership of that school and oftentimes finds himself referring students to that charter school because of the added support it offers that specific population of students. Awareness of a niche or area of specialization could actually provide a means of support - rather than source of competition – to the public school district.

While there are currently disincentives for districts and charter schools to collaborate and share best practices, district leaders may want to learn from charter schools in other regions that serve a particular need. Our study has revealed that the most collaborative public school district/charter school relationships exist in areas where the charter school has identified a targeted niche.

District and charter school leaders should identify commonalities. District leaders should consider initiatives or programs that would benefit the district and charter to undertake in common such as sharing teacher professional development opportunities and the sharing of

curriculum initiatives.

Promote the notion of “our students.” District leaders should embark on an advocacy campaigns throughout the community that the students from that locality are “our students” regardless of where they opt to attend school. This may weaken the “us” versus “them” mentality and encourage a “win-win” educational philosophy among community groups – one that is central to our democratic principles in public education.

Ensure all programs promote equity and access for all learners. District level superintendent and charter school leaders should work to ensure that high quality specialized programs offered in district schools and charters promote equity and access for all learners. The mission and goals of school districts and charter schools must be carried out with fidelity – not simply in a superficial manner to seemingly address a requirement.

Implications for Further Study

Replicate this study for charter school leaders and private school leaders given the impact of competition from charter schools on private school enrollment. In our investigation, we learned that competition took on many forms in the Commonwealth. Charter schools were just one consumer option impacting district schools. Our survey could be modified to ask similar questions to charter school, private school and/or Catholic school leaders.

Examine SAT scores and four-year graduation rates of students from charter schools and those graduating from traditional public school districts. This study might examine the question of whether there is truly value added to students attending charter schools. By examining SAT scores and graduation rates, we might be able to uncover whether the 1993 legislation is living up to its promise to make charter schools “models for replication in other public schools.”

Study to explore the phenomenon of charter schools competing with high-performing district schools. We might explore how the competitive marketplace is altered when a charter is placed in a traditionally high-performing school district. The study might investigate what types of students are attracted to the charter option in this scenario as compared to a charter in less high-performing district.

Replicate Lacireno-Paquet (2002) study that explored “cream skimming” and “cropping” behaviors of market and non-market-oriented charter schools in Massachusetts. This study would replicate the Lacireno-Paquet study in Washington D.C., in which they found different clientele being targeted at market-driven and non-market-driven charter schools. Market-driven charter schools were found more likely to operate in ways that limited access to high needs students (both advertently and inadvertently) and nonmarket driven charter schools were found to be more likely to focus specifically on high needs students or specialized populations. By looking at Commonwealth charter schools through the lens of market-orientation, we could determine if the phenomenon has a similar or different manifestation in Massachusetts.

Develop a longitudinal study exploring the outcomes of students who returned to district from charter and those who remained at charter schools. We could take many years and follow a select cohort as they navigate the educational marketplace in Massachusetts. By observing the progress of students who remained at the charter school and those that returned, we might determine whether returning to the district school had any negative educational or social impact.

Test the perceptions of superintendents in a variety of categories with real enrollment data. This study could determine whether the perceptions of superintendents about charter schools with regard to types of students, funding and achievement levels are accurate after an analysis of the data. We could then return to the superintendents who initially took our

survey and investigate whether perceptions have changed or been confirmed after looking at the data.

Study the actual reasons parents choose charter schools. We could use a mixed-methods study to analyze the specific reasons why parents select the charter option over the traditional public school.

Study the collaboration of superintendents and charter school executive directors to determine what factors might be instrumental in establishing a successful district-charter collaborative relationship. This study would be primarily focused on leadership methods that are employed by charter school executive directors and district superintendents who choose to collaborate in the face of competition. Specific factors would be analyzed to determine whether those leadership qualities could be replicated across the Commonwealth.

Study the impact of international performance of U.S. students on policy priorities. Using the results of the PISA test, as well as other international educational indicators, we could determine whether these data have any bearing on the development of policy in Massachusetts.

Study the role of the teachers unions in supporting or rejecting potential charter school innovation. A mixed-methods study might investigate how members of teacher unions view the 1993 Educational Reform Act, particularly in regard to whether they are aware of any innovations in the local charter schools. The study might seek to determine if there is any effort to replicate and explore the factors that allow district and charter school collaboration around innovation. Barriers to innovation could also be analyzed.

Study the role of choice in political campaigns on both sides of the aisle. A political science study could explore how local and national politicians are using the role of choice to frame their political message about education. What words, phrases, images and data are politicians employing to target voters?

Study the impact of charter schools on homeschooling. This study might explore how the educational marketplace has impacted the place of homeschooling in the Commonwealth. We might explore whether the legislation on charters has had a negative or positive impact on the homeschool movement.

Study the impact of charter schools on private schools. This study might explore how the educational marketplace has impacted the place of private schools in the Commonwealth. We might explore whether the legislation on charters has had a negative or positive impact on the private schools.

Study the impact of virtual learning on choice options. We could investigate how virtual learning and/or massive open on-line courses (MOOCs) have altered the educational marketplace with regard to consumer choice.

Study the demographics of those engaging in inter-district school choice in Massachusetts. Our investigation elicited a new perspective on the role of inter-district school choice in the educational marketplace in Massachusetts. Although there were some superintendents who felt that their districts were being negatively impacted by the presence of charters, consumers participating in school choice have also had an impact on district racial and socio-economic demographics.

Contribution to Practical Knowledge

This study will provide superintendents in Massachusetts with a wealth of substantive information on collective perceptions about charter schools, the impact of charter school competition on traditional public districts, and the relationship between charter school competition and innovations enacted in public districts. We anticipated that our findings would reveal that while respondents were reluctant to admit to competitive pressure of charter schools stimulating change in their districts, the number of reported changes as expressed in the interviews revealed that charter schools have had a competitive effect on public school districts.

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Appendix A – SURVEY

We are conducting this survey as part of a Boston College doctoral dissertation on the impact of charter schools on decision-making in traditional public schools. Participation in this survey is voluntary, but your participation will greatly benefit our study and we believe will add value to the leadership of M.A.S.S. This should take about 10-15 minutes of your time.

Thank you for your participation.

1. Participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. Information provided in this survey will be used in our study only in aggregate form. No individual district or participant information will be identified in our reporting. To consent to participate in this survey and for your responses to be used in the aggregate, please check the button below confirming your consent to participate.
 - ☐ I consent to participate in this Survey
 - ☐ I decline to participate in this Survey
2. Please select the region to which your district is assigned for the M.A.S.S. regional superintendent round-tables.
 - ☐ Berkshire County
 - ☐ Connecticut Valley
 - ☐ North Shore
 - ☐ Old Colony
 - ☐ South Shore
 - ☐ TriCounty
 - ☐ Worcester County
 - ☐ Merrimack Valley
3. Is your district assigned to the Urban Superintendents Network?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

4. Please select the enrollment range that most accurately captures the size of your district.
If your district is not a K-12 district please also click the choice "Not a K-12 District"
and then specify the grade levels in your district.

- ☐ less than 1,500 students
- ☐ 1,500-2,500 students
- ☐ 2,501-4,000 students
- ☐ 4,001-6,000 students
- ☐ 6,001-10,000 students
- ☐ More than 10,000 students
- ☐ Not a K-12 District - please specify grade levels in your district

5. Is there a local or regional charter school that your district's students are eligible to attend?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other, please specify

6. What percentage (%) of students leave your district to enroll in a charter school?

- ☐ Less than 1%
- ☐ 1% to 2%
- ☐ 3% to 4%
- ☐ 5% to 6%
- ☐ 7% to 8%
- ☐ 9% or more

7. Which of the following ratings best describe your perception of the impact that charter schools have on your district in the following areas:

| | No Impact | Minimal Impact | Moderate Impact | Major Impact |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Student enrollment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| District budget | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Access to community partnerships | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Student demographics | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| District priorities or decisions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Access to extracurricular and/or recreational facilities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Credibility or reputation of schools or district | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other, Please specify <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please provide additional information or examples for any of the areas above in which you reported a "moderate" or "major" impact of charter schools on your district.

8. What is your perception about the likelihood of the following groups of students to enroll in charter schools?

| | Not likely at all | Minimally likely | Moderately likely | Extremely likely |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ELL Students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Students with Advanced MCAS scores | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Special Education Students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Students qualifying for Free or Reduced lunch | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other, Please specify <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

9. Which of the following ratings best describe your perception about the frequency with which parents use the following as reasons when they choose to enroll a child in a charter school?

| | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Most of the Time |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Class Size | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| School size | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Specialized program | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Curriculum design | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Achievement results in your district | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Achievement results in the charter school | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Philosophy or approach to education | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having a choice or alternative | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Learning time | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Geography or distance from home | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Parent perception that charter is more "elite" | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other, Please Specify <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

10. Does your district collect data from parents about their reasons for choosing charter schools?

- ☐ Yes (Please explain below.)

☐ Not yet, but in the works. (Please explain below.)

☐ No

11. Please select initiatives your district has undertaken that are, in part, influenced by the presence of a charter school option for your students. Please select all that apply.

In the text boxes below each initiative you select, please provide information about the initiatives that you think would be helpful for our study.

- ☐ New curriculum & instruction initiatives
- ☐ Modifications to school hours of operation
- ☐ Launching of marketing materials or strategic communications about district programs
- ☐ Modifications to work conditions for staff
- ☐ Capital improvements to buildings or infrastructure
- ☐ Design of specialized programs
- ☐ Change in pace or level of priority for initiatives we planned to do anyway
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other, Please specify

12. Please name your district. This information is requested so that we can explore state-wide data and patterns. No survey participant or district will be named in our study and all responses to this survey and any other activities will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout our report. Answering this question is optional, but strongly encouraged to strengthen our study.

13. We will be conducting additional activities including interviews to further deepen our understanding of this topic. If you would be willing to participate, please select from the activities below.

- ☐ Individual interview
- ☐ Interest in receiving a copy of the executive summary of the report produced
- ☐ If interested in participating further in our study, please provide your name and contact information below

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your perceptions of or concerns about charter schools?

Thank you so much for participating in our study! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us: Cathy Cummins, Bernadette Ricciardelli, or Peter Steedman - cumminck@bc.edu

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

(Corresponding RQ 1) How do Superintendents in Massachusetts schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive educational marketplace?

1. Please name the charter school(s) students in your district are able to attend.
2. What is the purpose/niche for that charter school?
3. What is your opinion of this Charter School(s)? What is your opinion of Charter schools in general?
4. Has this perception changed depending on your role in the district? If so, how? [*probe: or for any reason?*]
5. Does the Department of Education role in approving and funding Charter Schools impact your perception of Charter Schools? If so, how?
6. How would you characterize your communities' views about charter schools? [*probe for examples or evidence*]
7. In what way, if at all, is your district in competition with charter schools or any other school choice option? [*probe: Who are the consumers? What are the reasons? What are the conditions?*]

Corresponding RQ 2: What are the characteristics of competitive pressure created by charter schools' on districts in Massachusetts?

8. How, if at all, are charter schools impacting your district? [*probe: how? students? enrollment? funding? reputation?*]
9. (a) Describe the students most likely to leave the district to enroll in a charter school?
(b) Describe the students least likely to leave the district to enroll in a charter school?
[*Probe –Are there any patterns in socioeconomic status, achievement status, demographic trends? Are there students who initially leave but who return to the district? How have you formed this impression?*]
10. Describe the reasons parents use in making the decision to seek enrollment in charter schools. [*Probe for class- or school size, founding principle, specialty, reputation, achievement. How have you formed this impression?*]
11. How do your perceptions that you have articulated thus far influence your approach to planning initiatives in your district? [*Probe for parents, community members, faculty*]

(Corresponding RQ 3) What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools?(Peter)

12. What are some initiatives you have undertaken in your district? *[Probe for specific examples]*
13. What are reasons for undertaking each of those initiatives? *[probe for influence of charter competition.]*
14. What were your goals with these initiatives? *[probe for influence of charter competition]*
15. How do you evaluate the success of these initiatives?
16. What have you done or are you currently doing to address the presence of charter schools? *[probe for actions, non-actions, those that are instructional, organizational, or about publicity]*
17. What do you think are the most important issues to address in the next decade concerning the relationship between Districts and Charter Schools? *[probe: Is there a role for DESE? Is there a role for Districts?]*

APPENDIX C Domain Map

| Domains | Subtopics | Data source #1 (QUANT) | Data source #2 (QUAL) | Potential codes |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Sub-Question 1 (Bernadette) How do superintendents in MA schools perceive charter schools in the context of a competitive education marketplace? | “Perceptions of competition?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrollment Financial Impact Tipping Point? Community perception of charter and district reputation Consumer (students & parents) Perceptions of marketplace theory implement through legislation Perception of fairness in the charter choice market Perception of MA legislative intent and realization of that intent Other Sources of school choice competition (private, school choice, vocational/technical) Does policy/legislation & the resultant funding influence how superintendents experience competitive pressure? | Survey questions: 5, 6, 7 | Questions from Cluster 1 of interviews: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 Comments from Survey: 5, 6, 7, 12 | Resources 01 Enrollment 01 Comm. Partner 01 Reputation 01 Consumer Parent 01 Access to Ex.Curr & Rec Fac 01 OTHER Competition 01 Consumer Student 01 Funding Formula 01 |
| Sub-Question 2 (Cathy) What is the nature of competitive pressure created by charter schools on districts in MA? | “Characteristics of pressure?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of students School conditions Relief Achievement results Chooser reasons Sustainability Specialization/Niche Are there certain kinds of students exiting that create more or less perceived pressure? Are there conditions in districts or characteristics of charter schools that decrease competitive pressure and influence | Survey questions: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 | Questions from Cluster 2 of interviews: 7, 8 a and b, 9, 10 Comments from Survey: 6, 7, 8, 9, 12 | Types of Students02 Stud Type: ELL02 Stud Type: Free/Reduced 02 Stud Type: High Achievers 02 Stud Type: Sp.Ed.02 Other types of students02 School Conditions 02 Provides Relief - Fills Gap 02 Achievement Results 02 Chooser Reasons 02 Reason Class Size 02 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| | collaboration? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there patterns to the types of students leaving or not leaving? • CHURN • Creaming • Types of Parents | | | Reason School Size 02 Reason Curr. Design 02 Reason Ach. Results 02 Reason Spec Program 02 Reason - Alternative/Choice 02 Reason Learning Time 02 Reason Geography 02 CHURN 02 Specialty/Niche 02 |
| Sub-Question 3 (Pete) What are some examples of innovations in traditional public schools that are influenced by competition from charter schools? | “Actions in response?” (Innovative or not?) <u>Administrative</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Facilities • Communication, Marketing & Promotion • Professional Development <u>Instructional innovations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized Program • Extended learning time • Pedagogical Practices • Curriculum • Student Assessments • Professional Collaboration • Technology <u>Changes (Not Innovative)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Advocacy | Survey questions: 7, 8, 9, 10 | Questions from Cluster 3 of interviews: 8 a and b, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 Comments from Survey: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 | <u>InAD</u> = Administrative Innovations InADWC = Working conditions InADIN = Infrastructure InADFAC = Facilities InADMP = Mrkting & Prom InADPD = Prof Dev InADCO = Communication InIN = Instructional innovations InINSP = Specialized Program InINLT = Learning Ttime InINPhil = Phil/App Education InINCurr= Curriculum Design InINAss = Student Assessments InINColl = Prof. Collab InINTech = Technology ChNOT = Changes (Not Innovative) ChNOTAdv = Advocacy ChNOTPol = Policy ChNOTOther = Other |

| Domains | Subtopics | Data source #1 (QUANT) | Data source #2 (QUAL) | Potential codes |
|--|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Overarching Question: How does a superintendent's perception of competitive marketplace pressure associated with the presence of a charter school his/her district impact the development of district innovations? | “What kinds of pressure results in what kinds of actions?” | Filter question pairs/triads: 6 (%) → 7 (impact) 8 (student type) → 7 (impact) 9 (choice reasons) → 7 (impact) 8 (student type) → 10 (initiatives) 9 (choice reas.) → 10 (initiatives) 7 (impact) → 10 (initiatives) 2,3,4 (demog.) → (7 impact) 2,3,4 (demog) → 8, 9 (type/reas.) 2,3,4 (demog) → 10 (initiatives) | Filter question pairs/triads: 2 (niche) + 8 (student) → 9 (reason) 3 +4 (attitude) → 7 (impact) 2 (niche) → 11 (initiatives) + 15 (inn.) 9 (ch. reas) +6 (comm. vw.) → 7 (impact) 8 (student type) → 10-15 (initiatives) 9 (choice reas.) → 10 (initiatives) 7 (impact) → 10 (initiatives) | Meta-Inference: QUAN ↔ QUAL |